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RICO

BANDIT AND DICTATOR

BY
ANTONIO DE FIERRO BLANCO
Author of 'The Journey of the Flame'



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO

WALTER DE STEIGUER

Whose sympathetic appreciation of my efforts to obtain every detail of a great Dictator's life has carried me through many arduous disappointments.

In whose house I have eaten, when otherwise I might have hungered.

Whose friendship aids me to endure age, now that my task is finished and idly I await what comes.

ANTONIO DE FIERRO BLANCO

*I specifically deny intention to indicate historical
origin or parallel for any character or event of
this book.*

A. DE F. B.

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RICO

BANDIT AND DICTATOR

CHAPTER I

THE BLACK GHOST

THIS is not a biography of our great Dictator. Nor does it deal with Rico's political life, which is amply covered by other writers.

Neither do I give those legends which have gathered about his great career and which I regard as mere superstitions: for example, that he was born with a full set of teeth and, when a month old, in a fit of rage bit off one of his mother's nipples. The daughter of Rico's old nurse will neither affirm nor deny that his mother possessed both nipples at her death. I have repeatedly questioned this *rocín*,¹ both on Sunday and on All Hallowe'en, but she yields me no definite information.

Like most illiterates, that old woman preserves her memory intact, but is so inflated with pride at her accidental connection with Rico that she would willingly have him called Monster or God.

¹ Stupid work-horse.

RICO, BANDIT AND DICTATOR

If, therefore, you wish superstitions or politics, go elsewhere: I give only his personality, his youth, his exploits, and his methods of government. Evil and good; wisdom and folly; greatness and weakness; the truth, welcome or unwelcome. Read, with admiration and pity.

As for myself, the compiler, pardon me, reader, if, for once only, I thrust myself forward to explain who I am, what difficulties I encountered in my task, and how good luck at times aided me.

I am proud of our family name, 'Blanco,' ¹ for it was gained in battle against the Moors, such good warriors as nearly to have driven the Spaniards from Spain. The Moors ridiculed my ancestor who founded our family, a blond Norseman, calling, 'He is white with fear.' But he dyed them red with blood.

My second name, 'de Fierro,' ² comes to me through that ancestor who was with Cortes on his march to the City of Mexico. On meeting an army of Indian warriors, Cortes halted his troops, and sent my ancestor on foot as Herald of Peace. As he stalked forward in full steel armor, the missiles of the enemy, striking him, fell to the ground, and he, uninjured, went on toward them. Seeing this miracle, the Indians threw down their weapons, shouting:

'The White God comes! He is of metal!'

And they worshiped him, for the magicians of Montezuma had predicted the return of the White God, who in the Long Ago taught the Aztecs their

¹ White.

² Of iron.

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civilization. The Spanish interpreter, being a woman and ignorant, mistranslated 'metal' as 'iron.' Since then, 'de Fierro' has been used by my family as a second name for all males.

This Conquistador ancestor married the daughter of Quauhtemotzin, Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the last Aztec emperor. From her, my family acquired a vast treasure in gold, and the Indian blood of which, like Rico, we are proud. This fortune was lost: but the Blancos soon accumulated others, which we retained until a few years ago. But after I had been for a long time occupied with the assembling of this book, an economical government confiscated my estates and paid for them in unsalable bonds yielding no interest. I found myself, therefore, on the verge of destitution.

In the narrow halls and steep staircases of the San Francisco lodging-house to which I was then reduced, I had passed for some weeks an aged man, whose face, seamed with unresisted passions, I detested. He was small, thin to emaciation, bent by age, and poorly dressed, and, as he seemed ill-mannered, I was polite to him but avoided him.

Going out one morning to buy my daily loaf of stale bread, I saw him standing on a curb. As he waited, some high-school boys passed, splashing mud from their car on his trousers. He, silent at first as he viewed this catastrophe, when they laughed, cursed them ferociously in Spanish, by the oath of the Flying Fish which carried Tortugero, and in the skillet yielded Black Magic as their fat fried.

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Now, pantaloons are the anxiety of all men who hover on the verge of charity, since they are an absolute essential. Often I myself take off my breeches and sit in bare legs in my room, to prevent wear. In summer, this does not matter, for I can lock up my garret. But in winter, I must open the door to allow heat to enter from that wasted by the careless rich below. Then some ill-bred or drunken fellow stumbles in upon me, or my landlady enters to discourse upon rental, and, in bare shanks, it is difficult to be dignified and self-respecting. Therefore, with great pity for this old man, I stopped to wipe off with my pocket-handkerchief the mud on his trousers before it could harden, for nothing wears worn cloth so much as attempts to remove dried filth.

When he had finished his oath by the Flying Fish of Tortugero, I said as apology concerning the aid I was giving him:

‘It is fortunate that the Black Ghost died long ago.’

As all know, this bandit permitted no one else to use his special oath, and either removed the ears of the profane, that his commands might be the better understood, or at least split them as one ear-marks a cow.

‘It is necessary that I count those who profane my oath,’ he explained to many in the old days, ‘and only by keeping their ears in my saddle-bags can I be accurate in my accounting.’

The Black Ghost had, in fact, a passion for ears, and kept a collection of those of the Guardia Civil, which often vainly attempted to capture him. These

THE BLACK GHOST

ears he sold, when he needed money, to rich men or to officials or store-keepers, but he was strictly just in his prices so that, while a *haciendado*¹ or official paid ten thousand pesos for one ear, he was known to have given a pair for ten pesos to the keeper of a small *pulperia*.² Moreover, he considerably charged less for ears when dried than when fresh, saying, 'All shop-keepers charge less for shop-worn goods. Why should not I?' It was his boast that no man ever refused to buy of him, nor had any ventured to cheapen his goods.

'Who has a better right than I to that oath?' the old man demanded of me, and he scowled down upon me as I bent over my cleaning, more ferociously than he had upon the boys.

'Body of Christ!' I swore, startled by the favor God had just done me. For I knew that the Black Ghost had been a friend of Rico's youth. 'Had I known that you were still to be found, I would have sought you even in Hell. No man have I ever needed so much as you.'

'And why in Hell?' he asked coldly, fumbling feebly at his belt for a knife he had long since pawned — that merciless knife which killed while he smiled, and without excuse other than that it thirsted for exercise and loved the terror it caused.

The possibility of the Black Ghost in Heaven appalled me, but I was well-trained as a boy and, in spite of age and light food, I am still quick-witted enough to be polite. Therefore I replied:

¹ Ranch-owner.

² The smallest type of general store.

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'Is not this city Hell?' And we were friends again, which was essential to me.

In my room, jumping from chair to chair, at great risk to himself and to the chairs, the Black Ghost explained to me his famous Retreat from the Volcano, and how they passed cliffs when all trails were closed by troops. When our landlady knocked to complain of the noise, he shouted:

'Slut, go thy way! I talk of how I killed thy grandfather, who sent me a goat when I had demanded a cow. Those who heard his fate thereafter stole what they lacked when I ordered from them.'

And to me, in apology:

'In my youth, I was too well occupied to learn manners.'

I told him, in my turn, of being lamed by my jump from the Usurper's statue, after I had demolished its bronze nose, and how, by falling backwards just as the execution squad fired, I escaped the death that others suffered for this exploit. (Though what followed was worse. They threw dead and living alike into a dump-cart, and slid us out at our grave, from which I crawled while the drivers gossiped and divided the clothing they had stripped from us.)

'What good did it do thee,' the Black Ghost scoffed, 'to smash a statue's nose?'

Almost I then lost all I had still to learn from him concerning Rico, for I hated this cold-blooded devil who mocked at the escapades I had dared. Had he been more than the hollow shell of what once he was, I would have killed him despite these Yankee laws.

THE BLACK GHOST

Fortunately, however, I was able to restrain my rage, and thus I learned what I tell you of Rico's youth.

Much else of what follows, Rico himself told to a German traveler, who enclosed it in seventeen thick volumes, learned, pedantic, invaluable. I read them, groaning, but hopefully, and was rewarded by stories unknown before and worthy of my labor. But against these volumes I warn my readers, for I have extracted from them all that is of interest.

At rare intervals, Rico explained his theories of government: these explanations were later written down by his secretaries, from whose notebooks I have selected those I give. For the rest, my information is derived from the notebooks of his servants, his friends, his mistresses, and his enemies, preserved in our capitol museum.

Now you are finished with me, the annalist, as with the Black Ghost (who, I fancy, now helps to mis-govern Hell) and with the other sources of my knowledge. The rest is all Rico: if he is now in China, he will rule and establish a new dynasty; if in Heaven, he is by now an archangel, for he was never a man who shirked authority nor failed so to lead as willingly to be followed.

CHAPTER II

THE JUNGLE

AN ENGLISH DUKE, Rico's friend, once inquired what surroundings had nurtured the youth of our Great Dictator. For him, Rico dictated to his secretary this description:

A limitless ocean of vast trees, too tall for sight, too enormous to be measured at one glance. Through it run roads, always wide and straight, built by those gods our ancestors, but now for millenniums untrodden by human foot. They are untrodden not because the Jungle has conquered them, has broken them up with untold generations of trees and tree-roots, no, but because we await our great leader who shall bring back with him our ancient civilization and revive our nation until it rules the world. Until then, ghosts alone wander these roads, and, where a slender trail crosses them, you find Votive Offerings and on each side a Kneeling-Place where those who pass greet on their knees the shades of those who created our past and pray for him who will create our future.

Through this enormous Jungle narrow paths wander uncertainly, paths one-Indian-wide, continually turning at right angles for a hundred yards or more to avoid some tree which fell and rotted a thousand years ago, then turning back at another angle to resume their indirect route. Such paths skirt sunlit glades,



THE JUNGLE

THE JUNGLE

where, hidden by tall cane underbrush, dwell those who are called the Silent Ones. Perhaps they are a race of nearly human apes; certainly they are huge creatures, mute, closely approaching to man in brain power, and greater than man in strength and in a mystic sort of cunning. They live alone, as they have always lived, destroying by the poison of their presence every tree seed which attempts to encroach on their domain. Into these tempting glades, no one of my race goes. And if some mortal, venturesome or careless, has entered one of them, his bones there rot. One passes such places fearlessly, but respectfully making a polite flexure toward them, and also that sign of the Silent Ones, in answer to which the sound of a breaking cane or a deep rustle among the underbrush comes, a reassuring greeting from those who dwell therein.

At times these paths curve widely to avoid some such ancient habitation as La Chisera, the House of the Wizard, where, when first a bandit captain, I hid my *partido*¹ of followers, certain that no spy would shadow nor troops oust me. Who the Wizards were and what their powers, one hears whispered in our dwellings only at certain phases of the moon. Then their shades are otherwise occupied and no longer linger about our *jacals*,² listening, eternally listening, and, when they suspect us of concealed knowledge, felling some rotten tree upon us, or diverting a Junglemaster to our death.

¹ Group.

² A wattled hut, with a central opening in the roof for smoke.

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Our Jungle is carpeted with death. Serpents slither unseen through the dense vegetation, and the Junglemaster is their chief. Deadly, malicious, noiseless, its color is that of the spot where it waits or of that through which it glides. It seeks its victims as the ambitious woman seeks hers — only to sense its powers of destruction.

There are plants which can absorb venom from some dead serpent's skull, and, by a pinprick, or merely by their odors, produce rotting sores, from which men die slowly and painfully, praying for that death they fear. Everywhere are small living things, never seen, but boring painlessly into human flesh until, once within, they make of life an unending hell. Here, too, vampire bats lull with whispering wings, until the sleeper sleeps eternally, or, more luckless, wakes to find a formless blackness sucking away his heart's blood, and is too listless to resist this slow draining of life. Overhead hovers Miasma, humming gleefully to itself of the fevers it produces, which chill us until our bones rattle or flush us with unbearable heat.

Yet perhaps, as I think, all these Jungle enemies are conspiring to produce in our race men and families immune to their influence, stronger and worthy of our ancestors, who also conquered the Jungle's terrors and snares. Then, with renewal of our former vigor, we shall drive into that ocean whence they came these foreigners who now by their presence curse our country. We shall turn the Americas from their present devastating civilization to a cult of lei-

THE JUNGLE

sure, of Nature as it was first born, and of that gentle, unselfish, warless, universal abundance which was ours before our first home, Sibele, sank beneath the ocean waves.

The Jungle has protected us even while destroying us. It has preserved our religion and our ancient cities, our race and its traditions. To it we shall owe our future.

CHAPTER III

RICO'S ANCESTRY

I. DON RICO

ACCORDING to local gossip, Rico's father appeared one evening in that village in which he died, driving a donkey not too heavily loaded. In a week, he had married the fourteen-year-old daughter of the local judge who was also, in secret, the High Priest of our Old Religion.

For his wife a hut was built, such as all the village lived in, with sides and roof thatched and a central roof-hole for smoke, though cooking was done in a *ramada*¹ adjacent. When it was finished, he sent a dozen carriers to the nearest coast-town store, with a piece of paper — a hundred-pound Bank of England note, as I found from the *tiendero's*² books — and a list of goods.

Meanwhile, a two-story limestone house was built for him and mortared, not dry-laid as is the local custom. The door of four-inch hewn planks was covered with sheet-iron brought from the coast. There were no windows in the first story, and in the second, only sliding sheets of iron. All trees near were cut down and the roof fireproofed by iron over thick thatch. Into this house no one penetrated, except very occasionally his wife. Days and weeks he would spend

¹ An open shed, with thatched roof.

² Storekeeper.

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in measuring and sketching our ruined cities, and then for weeks he would not leave his house.

'Writing, writing, writing!' exclaimed his wife. And with the fiery energy of youth, she cursed by all the gods, ancient and modern, all papers and pens and pencils. But that was when young, say, up to sixteen years. Later she grew silent, and fear passed into her eyes, fear not of her husband, but for him.

At first, he was little esteemed, for he noticed no one, speaking only to give an order, and then so harshly as to force offense. Knives were drawn on him, but these he parried so dexterously with a short, thin sword carried for jungle work and for killing snakes that it was felt he must be a man of power protected by the New Gods. Especially as he disarmed, but did not kill, those who assaulted him. This facility with the sword he taught his son, who several times owed his life to the skill thus learned.

Later, as time and again he sent porters to our seacoast with small pieces of paper, and they obtained what he wanted, the village became proud of him and referred to him as 'The Patron.' Thereafter, they guarded, they protected, they wondered at, but never resented him; since, if one profits by a man as they by him, it is but decent to yield to his ways and regard his wishes.

Lacking any other name, he was universally addressed as 'Don Rico' because he, alone in the village, possessed money and spent it carelessly, although his wife saw to it that he got good value. 'Rico' means simply 'Rich Man.' Rico himself was given his name

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because from the time he could stand alone he attacked with whatever was handy all who called him by any other name. He deserved the name, also, because an occasional *rial*¹ came his way, probably through his mother's indulgence. He had no way of spending the money, since the district was too poor to possess a store, but, nevertheless, it was wealth.

Later in life, Rico said:

'The desire for a *pulperia* in which to spend my treasure — possibly a dozen ten-cent pieces — nearly made me become a *tiendero* after my father's death, instead of beginning my glorious career as bandit and Dictator.'

Once, indeed, Rico tried to change his name, and for this reason: Out of our great Jungle came one day a travel-worn party of scientists, exhausted by months of labor in our ancient buried cities and livid with those fevers which the Scarlet Bird sows there to prevent such sacrilege. Their porters scattered their loads on the single narrow street of the village, while the foreigners dropped beneath the first shade offered them, for our sun scorches even those shaking with fever.

Going home, Rico's father passed them, as he passed everyone, without curiosity; or would have passed them had it not been that the foreigners, glancing at him with the utmost astonishment, sud-

¹ *Rial* — a 'bit.' The word is now little used except in saying, 'Not worth a *rial*.' A ten-cent piece is occasionally called a *rial*. *Dos riales* corresponds somewhat to the Yankee expression, 'Two bits.' A. de F. B.

RICO'S ANCESTRY

denly rose and stood with hats off bowing from the hips before him. Their language was unknown to those who watched, but they called him '*Hoheit*',¹ as Rico, who crept near to listen, remembered. Also, though swaying with fatigue and fever, they stood for an hour while he, Don Rico, seated carelessly on a log, questioned remorselessly, they addressing no word to him except in answer to his questions. He left them abruptly, receiving those deep bows with which they had first greeted him, their hats always off, despite the sun, until he passed from sight.

That night two of them came, and Rico, hidden behind a corner of his father's house, saw them receive a mass of written paper from him. Next day, they were gone at dawn, and Rico began training his satellites to call him '*Hoheit*' instead of 'Rico,' to stand when he sat, and not to speak until spoken to by him. Hats were a difficulty, as none wore other than thick tangled thatches of black hair, which could not be taken off when they met him. However, bits of dry palm leaf answered, somewhat grotesquely, the purpose of hats. Many a savage fight resulted when he met a chum unprovided with a palm leaf. This play, fascinating at first, grew tiresome to all concerned, and Rico compromised on '*Horico*' until time brought back 'Rico,' alone.

A magnificent monograph on our ruined cities was issued, I find, some years later in Europe, but no credit is given for measurements and descriptions, or for anthropological data in that vicinity. Those

¹ German: Highness.

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named as authors are dead, and have left no means by which I can trace Don Rico's name or lineage. Long since rotted in jungle earth, Don Rico took with him all knowledge of what he had been and whence he came. A mystery, but only one among many mysteries of which the tropics are full, for men who tire of perpetual strife in other civilizations come to our Jungle to die easily and without effort.

In the time of Cortes, the son of a papal family — heretics say, of the Pope himself — lay happily down here to die, and ever-blooming vines have long since absorbed even his bones. In my own time, I have helped to bury the son of an English chancellor, and his friend, a great German noble, related to all the kings of Europe. Both died contentedly, reviling the civilization they had left behind as born of Satan, and praising our Jungle as a haven of rest and peace where men are men, not machines.

Opinion in my country thinks Rico's father to have been one of the Austrian archdukes. The Hapsburg family combined insanity with genius; an ability to rule men, and with it, a total disregard, almost a hatred, of the men themselves. As a family, they were never united except in haughty contempt for all others. Their tragedies were many and well concealed.

To mention only the last generation: the death of their Crown Prince Rudolph was called suicide, though the back of his head was found crushed, and glass was extracted from his brain, which is an unusual form of suicide. He is known to have strongly

RICO'S ANCESTRY

opposed the policies of the German Kaiser toward Russia, and it is believed that he fomented rebellion against his father, the Emperor. Investigation was so vigorously suppressed that, at the death of the Emperor Francis Joseph, all Imperial archives regarding the Crown Prince's death were missing.

The Archduke Louis Victor, also supposed to have been a leader in this Hungarian plot, and regarded as the ablest of the family, was imprisoned in a family castle. What became of him it is impossible to trace. The *Almanach de Gotha*, that Bible of Europe's ruling caste, which gives pages to descendants and descendants of the Hapsburgs, mentions his birth, but leaves the date of his death blank.

The Archduke John Salvator, who vigorously opposed Germany in Bulgaria, besides having a part in the Hungarian affair, was shipped under the name of John Orth on a sailing vessel, with a carefully chosen crew, and was never thereafter heard of. Biographers suppose his vessel and all on board to have been lost off the coast of Brazil, though I find that the only ground for this supposition lies in a semi-official statement in a European paper evidently placed there to stop curiosity regarding the death of a man highly thought of by all who knew him.

As for the heir-apparent, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, whose killing at Sarajevo caused the Great War, the Austrian Chief of Secret Police is quoted as saying that, when the Emperor visited Sarajevo, a policeman stood behind every tree, whereas, when the Archduke himself (who was known to be at enmity

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with the Emperor) was sent there, behind every tree stood an assassin. The Emperor, when told of his heir's death, said:

'A Higher Power has restored the order that I was unhappily unable to maintain. The Almighty permits no challenge.'

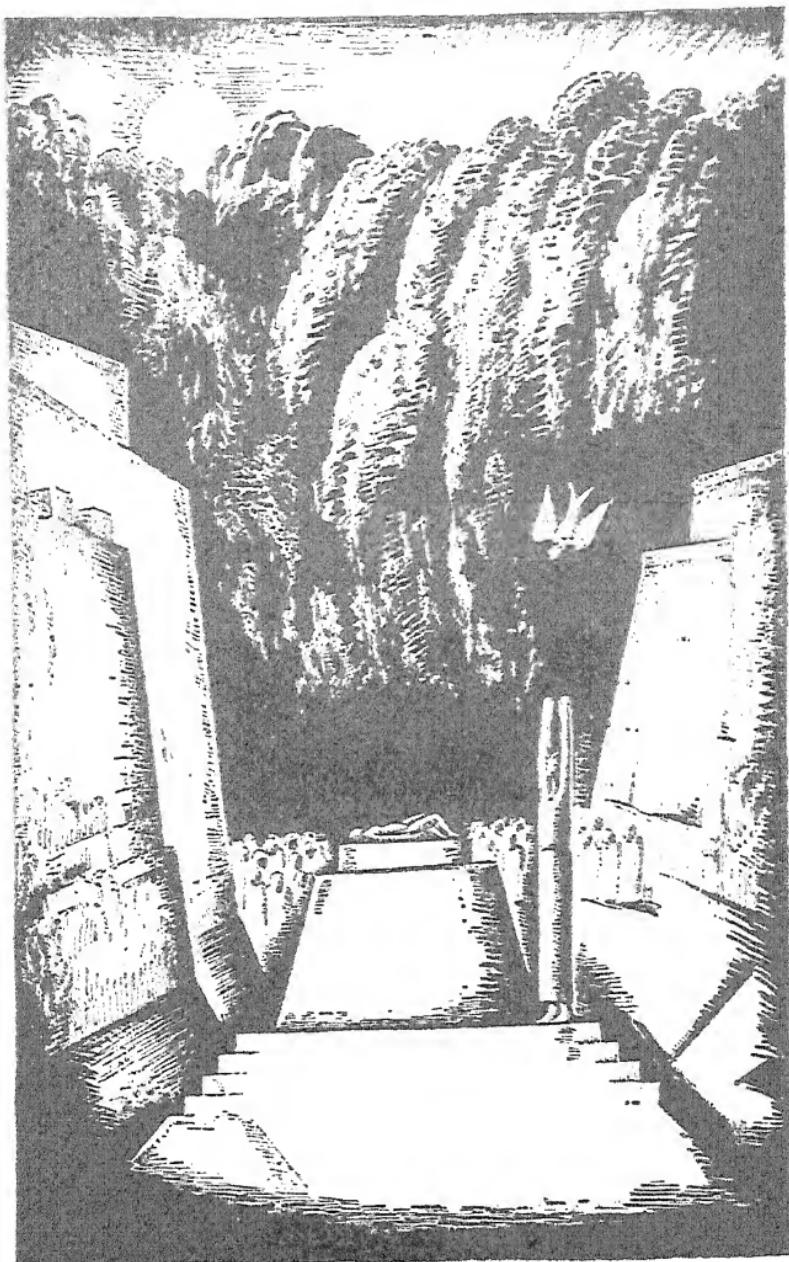
Strange family histories which leave anything possible and nothing certain.

But who Rico's father was and where he came from is, after all, of no moment to us. Curiosity alone (which I share) asks. Let curiosity, therefore, fit together all known facts and deduce that answer which bests suits it. I, for my part, have failed to deduce any answer at all, but I wish others better success.

2. RICO'S GRANDFATHER, PRIEST OF THE CRIMSON BIRD

Rico's mother was of that Indian race which prides itself on being so ancient that its ancestors built great stone cities while the land which is now the United States of the North had not yet risen above the sea, and Europe was first trodden by fur-clad savages. Even then, this race was highly civilized, for its calendar was more nearly perfect three thousand years ago than was ours until a few hundred years past. She belonged to that priestly caste which still celebrates our religion in public, and its own vastly older belief in private, and venerates its age-old lineage more than our God or its own.

This is its tradition: It first lived in Sibebe, the Lost Continent, a land very long and narrow, with many



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inlets and deep bays, and every few miles a volcano, which so enriched the soil with ashes that on an acre a whole family might live in comfort. Each volcano had its habits which the priests learned. The one nearest to the land of Rico's ancestors was called The Belcher, and when it shook the earth three times, they moved to the side of it from which the wind came, to avoid being smothered with ashes. It was in respectful memory of that volcano that the High Priest, Rico's grandfather, began each meal by a ceremonious belch, as a form of grace.

A time came when, ravaged by volcanoes, earthquakes, and vast tidal waves, the Lost Continent began to sink. The remnant of its people not already destroyed tried to escape: some who skirted the active volcanoes were overwhelmed by lava; others who sought refuge in the lowlands were swept away by tidal waves, which nearly met the lava from above. From a land where millions had perished, a few hundred thousand escaped. And of these but a few hundred at last reached the new land, where now their descendants live. These survivors were chiefly priests and nobles, for the common people lacked the mental qualities necessary for survival in a great catastrophe. The tradition continues that Crimson Birds hovered always ahead of the people, advising their halts, urging speed when danger threatened, and locating in the troubled waters those swarms of fish which alone fed them on their long flight.

Children died, and their mothers, remaining to bury them, were abandoned. The old perished, urg-

ing upon the young that haste which only the young could endure. The King and the High Priest, aged and exhausted, having traveled part of the way, refused to go farther, and sat upon a hillside, calling to their people to hasten on, and blessing them as they passed. The rearguard, looking back, saw that hill crumble into the ocean. Later, in the new land, a great city was built to commemorate the selflessness of those two, who might have caused a whole race to perish, yet preferred to die alone.

The religion of Sibele had been gentle and spiritual rather than physical. But after thousands of years had passed, the new land, at first high, beautifully wooded and fertile, also began to sink until its streams became torpid rivers which rose in great floods over the lowlands. Then the tribe, feeling that their own god was neglecting them and allowing their new home to sink toward the ocean which had swallowed their race in the past, and perhaps misled by the brutal rites of other tribes about them, invented new gods. These demanded victims.

For thousands of years, a Crimson Bird, dyed with sacrificial blood, has been loosed each year on the day of the arrival in the new land, that it might fly out over the Great Ocean in search of the Lost Continent, which, it is expected, will rise again, renovated from sin, to be the home of its old race. While the tribe waits twelve hours for its return, as ritual demands, virgins are sacrificed to the God of Floods. When the Bird does not return, their ancient ruined cities are that night filled with wailing, and new vic-

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tims offer themselves for the next festival. For she whose blood dyes crimson that Bird which returns shall have a great city built to commemorate her sacrifice; a city in the old home, from which the Bird shall bring the great ruby which was set in their holiest temple.

Brought up as a fanatic in this religion, Rico's grandfather was austere, self-centered, intent only that in his day the sacrifices should be correctly performed. To Rico he taught the secrets of their old race, which are many and curious, but he could teach no belief in the rites.

3. HIS MOTHER

Jealousy of her husband's former friends, who were unknown to her, created in Rico's mother an intense desire for some proof of her superiority over her neighbors. Don Rico, perceiving this obsession, cynically determined to gratify it in order to see its effect on her character. Therefore, he had brought from the state capital, three hundred miles away, a door such as never before had been seen in our Jungle. It was of light planed wood, morticed and tenoned; it had hinges of brass, which shone like gold, and a handle on each side, instead of a string through a hole to lift a latch, which all the village doors had. With it had come a pot of crimson paint, in my country used only by the priestly caste, and considered supremely beautiful because it is the color of sacrificial blood, which is given to produce success in war, or to ward off floods.

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This door was carried the three hundred miles on a porter's back, and as our jungle paths were not wide enough to permit it to be carried flat, on an Indian's head, it had to be carried on edge, which was not easy. In due time, having been blessed by both the old and the new religious rites, it was painted and hung at the opening of Rico's mother's *jacal*.

Indians came from many miles around to see this wonder. To worship it? No, though not a few votive offerings were left secretly near it by visitors from more remote villages, who, to see it, had perhaps trotted for a week over vines and fallen trees through the Jungle. Only the members of the priestly caste were allowed to turn those smooth burnished brass handles; and at stated times — as at sunset or sunrise — the lesser people stood in a half-circle and watched them turn, with many an 'oh' or 'ah' from dry throats, swallowing in some fear and great curiosity.

On one such occasion, when the people were gathered, but the priest had not yet approached the door, the handles were seen to turn of themselves, and, rusty from lack of oil in our damp climate, they squeaked mechanically. All except the High Priest, Rico's grandfather, fell upon their faces. The wonder had spoken, and in a voice such as none had ever heard. Again the handle turned, and squeaked more loudly than before.

The High Priest, nonplussed because for once unable to explain to himself the supernatural of religion, motioned them away. Rico, who from within

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the hut had turned the handle, silently climbed through a hole in the thatched roof, not the central hole provided for smoke from the open fire, but one made by himself, smaller and more easily reached at the eaves. And as he escaped, he left behind him all fear of the supernatural. For one who has caused an oracle to speak, there can be no illusions. Fear of his grandfather survived; but physical fear only.

When, thereafter, they practiced the Ancient Rites, under age-old trees and beside some ruined city of their race — a city which had begun to crumble when the Christ of the New Religion was a-borning — then, with Rico, curiosity replaced awe. And when at its appointed time, a giant white bird flecked with crimson rose from the tree-top and flew toward their ancient ocean-covered home, he only wondered how it was loosed and who first tied it there. 'A priest,' he said in later years, 'must be either atheist or fanatic, or both, perhaps,' and he shuddered, for at such celebrations he had seen what troubled even him.

When Rico was a child, a drunken half-breed entered his mother's *jacal* and, closing its godlike door behind him, grossly insulted her. Enraged, she threw him through the door. Then, seeing the wreckage of her chief treasure, she fell on her knees and clasping her hands behind her neck, struck her head against the earthen floor. 'Rico!' she called. The boy, on his way to plunge his knife into the belly of the man outside, hesitated. 'It is unnecessary,' she told him. 'Notice how anger hurts one-

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self. I could as easily have broken his back across my knee, and now my door which your father gave me is destroyed. I was a lady, as are those city ladies whom your father knows, but now, with my door ruined, I am by my own fault only what I was before your father took me.'

It is, therefore, the power of example over the young which explains the wondering notes of a secretary, written many years later:

'Rico first raised the window — it was on the second story — and, calmly and without anger, threw out the corrupt Chief of Police. Then he said to his aide: "The poor fellow may be suffering. Go down and end his pain." No one can understand why he delayed first to raise the window.'

Such was Rico's inheritance from his mother.

CHAPTER IV

RICO'S CHILDHOOD

I. THE WOODEN LOCOMOTIVE

Rico remembered his father without affection but with intense admiration: certain anecdotes of his childhood, recounted by him in later years, show how his extraordinary memory treasured each word of advice his father had given him, and every detail of his life.

When he was four years old, Rico received from some unknown relations of his father's, in a far country, a wooden toy; a locomotive such as he, who lived remote from railroads, had never seen. It could be dragged, for its wheels revolved; there was a whistle in the smokestack which could be blown. His father (greatest of wonders) had wept while unpacking it. Rico played with it by day and slept with it—or on it—by night. To be allowed to look at it implied deep and long friendship, such as grows up in an hour among children. To be permitted to pull it or even to touch its twisted palm pulling-string was to have become a blood brother.

But there passed through Rico's village the small son of a secretary to the Governor of his state, wearing clothes, shoes, and a hat, and with clean shining face and combed black hair. 'Like a little Jesus,' the old women whispered, 'And on a donkey!'

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Rico, naked, dirty, unshod, able to see through his long matted hair only by tossing his head, was fascinated by this spectacle which he never in his life forgot. Running beside this ideal boy's burro, he offered his locomotive, and, joy almost beyond expression, it was accepted. Whence this cortège came and whither it went, only Divine Providence knows, but its passing saved Rico, the one genius of my country, from frittering away his great talents in a village life of idleness and drink.

For Rico's mother, leading the boy, dazed by the joy of giving and despair at losing, said to his father:

‘He has given his toy away.’

‘To whom?’ asked Don Rico, in that deep voice which to Rico implied control of the universe.

‘To the Governor’s secretary’s son.’

‘He will be a great man,’ commented his father cynically. ‘Already he gives to those who can aid him! Henceforth keep him clean, clothe him, cut his hair. He will make you famous.’ And to Rico he said:

‘Give always of your best to those who can aid you, and take, in moderation only, from those who cannot resist you.’ And he went on with that writing which never ceased.

Rico understood, even at that age, and thenceforth gave with a liberality for which he became famous, but only to those who could aid him. From those who could not resist, he never took all, but left a part, saying with a smile: ‘A nest-egg, my

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friend.' And was more loved for what he left than hated for what he took.

Moreover, to this incident can be attributed the fact that through his whole career as bandit and dictator, Rico was over-neat and clean. No small part of his influence is to be attributed to this almost supernatural cleanliness, which no heat, no jungle, no swamp was permitted to destroy. For one of my countrymen who praises his career or curses his brutality, a dozen exclaim in wonder:

'Mother of God! In the great defeat of San Juan de Dios, when death was on all sides of him, he yet stopped to kill a man who, with sweated hand, touched his coat-sleeve.'

They forget that the dirty hand on his sleeve was meant to detain him, and that he also killed the paid assassin who followed, and who never knew from behind what tree-trunk a dagger cut his throat. For Rico is credited with knowing without a glance what came behind him and what lay on each side. As for what faced him, there lay no danger: few men ever struck at him face to face, and such only in a futile effort to escape their fate.

2. 'DO NOT FEAR THY SUCCESSOR'

Again, when Rico was eight or thereabouts, a village boy twice his age fought with him for leadership on the edge of one of our ancient citadels with unmortared stone walls forty feet high. His competitor fell and was killed.

Said Rico's father to him: 'One lives by climbing,

RICO, BANDIT AND DICTATOR

but, my son, he who fights against thee is more likely to help thy career, living, as thy lieutenant, than when dead. If our present Dictator dared to employ men of talent in his government, you could never destroy him. If the present Governor of our state had not shot a dozen bandits in one day, there would now be a dozen more obstacles in thy way. Be braver than these men, and do not fear your successor. Be abler than they, and he who competes with thee will help to raise and maintain thee.'

3. THE GOLDEN SLUG

Rico has stated that his father by day feared neither God nor man nor Junglemaster; but by night he was never seen out of his second-story room, nor did he so sit or move as to expose himself between window and light. Moreover, he kept tightly closed all windows on the side of his writing-table. Therefore the people believed that the spirits of our old gods, who resented intrusion upon their solitude in our ruins, haunted him.

In one of his rare moments of confidence, Rico himself informed his first mistress, La Gloria, that when the Austrian scientists left the village, his father told his mother that he would be killed within the year; and he was so killed.

One night there was an explosion such as the village had never before heard. In an agony of fear, Rico's mother wept and called her husband the night through. (But even had he heard her, he would probably not have answered, for he was a man to

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whom the feelings of others meant nothing. Other men and women existed only for his convenience or pleasure. It was not that he was vicious, but that he seemed trained to regard with contempt all those around him.)

In the morning, a hole was seen in the iron shutter before his desk. When by night Don Rico had not appeared, the High Priest, his father-in-law, broke down the door, after appropriate rites for exorcising evil spirits. The village people stood in a wide circle, far enough away to disappear in the jungle should Don Rico be alive and angry, or should the god who had killed him desire also the lives of those who had helped him in sacrilege.

Don Rico was found dead, killed by a slug of iron, and torn by pieces of gold with which I judge the bullet had been surrounded, and which impact with the iron shutter had melted. 'It is the shaftless golden arrowhead ¹ with which also the gods killed in the Long Ago,' said the people. And they still bow as they pass that place, for the ancient gods honor even whom they kill, and the place they have visited becomes sacred.

Thereafter came the Governor of our state to seize that great treasure in Bank of England notes which it was rumored that Don Rico had hidden in his house. He found not one. But since Rico later armed his first *pronunciamento* with just such notes, it is possible that, child as he was, he had found and

¹ This tradition of the shaftless golden arrowhead suggests that the White God used gunpowder.

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re-hidden his father's fortune. The Governor had Don Rico's house pulled to pieces and the ground dug up in search for the treasure, and also destroyed the hut in which lived Rico's mother. Rico stood with a stone raised to throw at the Governor when he emerged from his father's house. But to him came his mother, whispering:

'Little fool, they will also destroy thee. Wert thou as wise as the dead, this had not happened, for, while he lived, they dared not enter his house. This Governor will not die within ten years: he is too learned and too cautious. Live, grow strong, grow wise, and thou shalt hang him to a tree, or, better, in the old way, decorate him with flaming arrows. And then thou shalt do by his palace what he has done to thy father's house.'

Rico obeyed her, and the stone dropped harmlessly to the ground. But the revenge he had promised to wreak on the Governor was for the moment forgotten in grief for his mother.

Before her living husband, she had stood with arms crossed on her breast and head bowed; but at his death she raised her head erect, listening, and to those mourners who reproved her, she said:

'He calls me.'

She performed automatically all the Indian rites of mourning until, a month later, they found her dead beside her husband's grave, with a smile of complete happiness upon her face. Such a smile as Rico remembered all his life. She must have loved Don Rico, though no one else did, and

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though during her life she had concealed her feeling from all.

After her death, Rico was for some weeks almost insane. Indeed, his enemies insisted he continued so through life, though this his political genius denies. As regards his private life, judge for yourself. You have herein all known facts.

Many years later, Rico himself described his suffering and how he was roused again:

'I lay in apathy on the floor of my hut, refusing food, refusing drink, and even striking my dog, which in sympathy licked my face. La Gloria, who was older than I, and long a playmate, and later to be celebrated for her beauty throughout Spanish-America, came and saved my life. She stood over me with a whip, which at each stroke drew blood from my half-naked body.

“ ‘Rise, lazy fool!’ she called. ‘Is not that Governor who tore down thy father’s house still alive and rich? Rise, fool, or I will cut out thy craven heart!’ ’

Thereafter, Rico never rested until he had completed his revenge: the story of which forms one of the most picturesque episodes of his early career.

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN OF ATLAN

WHEN Rico was of an age when girls began to make eyes at him, because of his looks and mastery of all playmates, the Woman of Atlan sent for him, and he went. She said to him:

‘I hear much of thee.’

And he trembled with fear lest what she had heard had not pleased her. For the Woman of Atlan was one who when displeased did not hesitate as to cure. For sixty years, she ruled a savage Indian tribe, independent, but dwelling within the borders of our country. She established a tyranny greater than ever before known, and yet her tribe never revolted; she forced a migratory people into agriculture and left them peaceful and self-ruled. So remarkable was her training that to this day Atlan remains unconquered, though she has been dead for many years, and strong numbers have made repeated attacks. Herself devoid of morals, she made morality a tribal custom. Jealous, mean in all ways, a miser, she was to her tribe a god, even when alive. Her bravos were so without fear, save of herself, that at a word from her they faced certain death.

Said Rico: ‘I once heard her say casually to one of them: “Kick that Junglemaster for me.” Not a



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shadow passed over the bravo's face. He instantly did her bidding, and died in horrible agonies. She did this only to show me the meaning of discipline. And wisely, as henceforth I feared her as I had thought never to fear man or woman, god or devil.'

About her, Rico's father once told him this story:

'The present Governor of our state built the first bridge in this district in order to visit a girl across the river. Though he supported her in luxury, yet he was old — over forty — and Enriqueta preferred more fiery lovers. *Madre de Dios!* What could he expect? When a girl is sixteen and of great beauty, blood boils with little fire. This the Governor's aide-de-camp, the young and handsome Lieutenant Zamorra, who waited on the Governor's pleasure outside the girl's cottage, soon discovered.

'At the open door one evening, she kissed the Governor's right ear, and over his shoulder winked an eye at the Lieutenant, whispering loudly enough to be heard by both:

'"Return quickly, beloved! Thou leavest me aflame with desire for thee."

'Men are fools of course. How many have lost all they valued in life for a *zorra*?^x The Governor killed the girl at last. Motioning to the watching lieutenant, he ordered him to bury her body. Lieutenant Zamorra obeyed, for discipline was well enforced by His Excellency. Had he not — as the Governor more than half hoped — he would have

^x *Zorra* — literally, a vixen (female fox). A polite name for a whore.
A. de F. B.

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been arrested for Enriqueta's murder. Who fails to believe a despot? Who gives sympathy or aid to a man caught seducing the paramour of a governor?

'Lieutenant Zamorra was of an old and powerful family, which could not safely be offended. So the Governor, wily and cruel as a Junglemaster, promoted him to be his representative to the Woman of Atlan. She also preferred men who were young and handsome. Moreover, since a lover who feared her gave little to her desires, and her tribe, which she ruled by fear, had none other to offer her, she soon made advances to the fearless lieutenant.

'He had really loved Enriqueta — or thought he did, which is the same thing. Carelessly he refused the gaunt and hideous Ruler of Atlan. Therefore she had him fastened to a tree, for she did not respect diplomatic immunities, and meated her pet songbird with him until he died. Her bird is a delicate feeder, people say, and prefers its meat freshly cut.

'The Governor certified the death of his ambassador as due to a malignant fever which necessitated immediate burning of the body. He also posted a notice of quarantine against all of Atlan until this fever should have abated. In his capital, everybody laughed, for the story was widely known, and his vengeance highly approved. The Governor later smiled, saying: "That young man was a choicy lover!"'

'But the message he received from the Woman of Atlan in protest against his quarantine kept him ill-tempered for a week.'

THE WOMAN OF ATLAN

In order better to control her tribe, the Woman of Atlan, during her long reign, eliminated from their language all foreign words. As a result of this, the tribes near them could not converse with them. The Atlan language has four terminations for sex: masculine, feminine, reasonable, unreasonable. A cat is female, reasonable. A horse, male, unreasonable. Man is always masculine, reasonable; woman, feminine, unreasonable. The language of the Tierra del Fuegans is the same in this detail. Curiously, the Chinese servants of *hacendados* near the Atlan territory claim to understand their language: and it has been observed that the Tribe of Atlan shows some Chinese characteristics.

'Live here for a year,' she of Atlan ordered Rico, 'and if thou art what they say, thou shalt learn to govern men, by fear, by superstition, by self-interest, by admiration for thyself. Learn also to trust no one, and yet to trust all, but especially never to trust a woman, lest she cease to be a toy, and in so ceasing, betray thee. If thou canst not learn all this, then also I have a place for thee, but somewhat dark and none too spacious.'

When Rico became Dictator, the Woman of Atlan sent to him an Indian of her tribe, with a message by word of mouth. (She would neither give nor receive writing, for she held it black magic that words should disappear upon paper, and at a later time and in distant places become words again. 'Words rot as soon as spoken,' she would say. 'A powerful devil must occupy and preserve written

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words, like a corpse which does not rot. To such, even I dare not listen. Besides, from such a paper my own words might jump and prove me a liar, whereas what I speak I can deny, and all believe my denial, lest it be inconvenient for them.’)

Her message said only: ‘Must I kill thee?’

To which he replied, also by word of mouth:

‘Govern thy people as thou wilt, but send me each year six of thy most faithful ones for my private use; such as this man who, with hand upon knife, delivered thy message to me, and did not fear either me or my guards.’

Thereafter, each year she sent him six men, who served as his bodyguard. But though they were always useful to him, and more than once saved his life, he knew that the Woman of Atlan consented to send them only because they were a constant reminder to him that she held his life in the hollow of her hand.

CHAPTER VI

RICO AS BANDIT CAPTAIN

I. HE IS ATTACKED FROM AMBUSH

‘WHEN I was but a bandit captain,’ said Rico, ‘I ran along a narrow jungle trail, seeking escape from those who pursued me. From ambush, a man jumped and thrust at me with his *machete*.¹ I felt for my pistol; but an afterthought taught me that I could not use it, since its report would bring my pursuers upon me. Thus I lost that infinitesimal moment necessary to save my life. I felt myself dead, and my great career sacrificed to slowness of thought. But my single follower pushed me aside and took the *machetaza*.² through his guts. In a moment, I had strangled the assassin, and turned to help my savior.

“‘My duty, Captain,’ he gasped, “but kill the men who pay these devils to assassinate you.”

“‘Within a month,’ I promised him, “those men shall hang over your grave, and they shall die not fast nor easily, for your sake.”

“‘My wife! My sons!’ he groaned, tearing at his belly in agony.

“‘Shall be cared for while I live,’ I swore. And I have done as I promised. Two of his sons died as my officers at the Battle of the Banners. The third

¹ Knife.

² Knife-thrust.

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survived Santa Ysabel, and on each anniversary dines with me, dressed in a gold-laced general's uniform which he captured in that bloody *hacienda*¹ house.

'My follower's wife I married to a plotting Spaniard, and gave his land to her, assuring him that, while she lived, he need not fear death. I passed their home not long ago, and she called to me from the *ramada* fronting her house:

'"My husband worries much about my health, General!"' And we laughed loudly together, as in the old days.

'His daughter was my mistress for a time, but she was so much overcome with her grandeur that she could only say, "Yes, General," and "No, General," which makes for dullness in a mistress, so I married her happily and well to one of her own class.'

2. HE FINDS A MAN QUICKER THAN HE

'I walked carelessly through the Jungle, dreaming of the first General's uniform I might capture and wear (for generals, being cautious men, were not so easily killed as I had at one time hoped). Suddenly, I looked down, and saw that I was about to tread on a Junglemaster. To move was death: for a fraction of a second I hesitated. In that fraction of a second, a man jumped from the bush beside me, and with bare feet trod on the snake's head. Consider: a cat's paw striking is quicker than sight, and the Junglemaster kills wildcats for mere joy of killing.

¹ Ranch.

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Yet this man moved before the snake could strike. I killed it, and said to the man:

“You are quicker of thought than I. Follow me, and we will rise together, provided that you do not attempt to precede me.”

‘He is now Governor of my most dangerous province. What became of his wife and children, you ask? He did not mention them, and they were his affair, not mine. At times, a wife is an incubus when a clever man rises in the world, and in my tropics none starves. He later married into a rich family which needed influence and found in a governor a desirable son-in-law.

‘A great man that Governor is—wily, cunning, remorseless and wise in selecting men, but weak as are all peasants, loving display. He begged for the right to place a naked foot treading a serpent’s head as an armorial bearing on his carriage door, and I, flattered, consented, though I allow no other coats of arms in my country. Then later it occurred to me that his coat of arms might equally apply to my destruction by my successor, for a dead dictator receives only scorn from the world.

‘Since then, I have at times wondered when I looked at that man. A peasant unduly risen in power knows no limit to his ambition. I wonder still, though he never breaks my sleep, for I am still the better man. Yet what, I ask myself, would be my action, should he come to be the better man? Should I give my place to him, an ignorant peasant who would reverse all my policies? Or kill him, and

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thenceforward fear each man about me as possibly greater than I?"

3. THE COMING OF ISMAEL

"When sixteen, sitting dejected, hopeless, before my campfire within the deep jungle at La Chisera where a Wizard had died — still merely a bandit after two years of battling, and bitterly discontented — I was minded to give up the struggle, and in drink and girls forget the destiny I had planned and for which my mother and father had trained me.

"Hating liquor, and yet tempted by the flask in front of me, which promised soul-elation and forgetfulness, I had reached the turning-point in my career. Never before, never since, did I doubt myself; but doubts were then overwhelming me.

""An old man of sixteen," I thought, "and nothing done. A few devoted men about me — but what bandit has not as many? The hope of my district and loved by it — but they believe even in God! What credit to me if so simple a people believe also in me?"

"Then out of the Jungle there came to me Ismael, a man I had never seen, whom at first sight I hated for his hands, which were too long, too supple, as if they could pull out my brain and examine it, with doubts as to its being worth replacing.

""Hombre,^x I am hag-ridden!" he exclaimed, and I hated him the more, for one does not say *hombre* to

^x Man.

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the lowest forest-dweller. But I kept down my rage, and laughed at him, saying:

“Here in the House of the Wizard, it should be a man who rides thee.”

“She herds me as if I were a wild goat,” he continued. “If I stop, she terrifies me until I must go on. Neither to the right nor to the left can I go, lest the horror of touching her come upon me. Only to you am I allowed to go. Yet I am a better man than you — why should I serve you?”

“If a better man, try me.” For there he touched my pride.

“Fool,” he said, “I could break your back across my knee.” And then I remembered that my mother had so spoken of the half-breed who insulted her. Looking behind Ismael, I saw the shadow of my mother, and she slowly shook her head at me. Never have I disobeyed my mother, so, reaching for the flask of *aguardiente*,¹ I merely replied,

“Go, then, in peace!”

“Peace!” he scoffed. “There is no peace for me except where thou art. She wears upon her little finger a ring with a Crimson Bird, which is for a sign to thee.”

“That ring was brought from our Lost Continent and worn by my mother in death as the last pure-blooded descendant of her family. I knew it well and instantly accepted it as an omen.

“Sit by me,” I said, “keep liquor from me now that I hesitate, or I shall be lost. I, for my part, will

¹ Brandy.

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keep thy hag from thee." And my mother, nodding her approval, vanished.

"For thee it is well," Ismael replied sullenly, "for I shall give my life for thee, I who am well content to live."

'And so he did, but that was long after.'

4. HE LEARNS TELEGRAPHY

In Rico's early career of banditry, the man who was then Dictator constructed telegraph lines to foil him. For three months, Rico worked, disguised, for the nearest telegrapher, bringing him each morning meat, eggs, or chicken — 'from my mother's jungle home,' he said. And when he had become so expert that the telegraph operator slept all day and drank all night, Rico burned the office, leaving within the body of his teacher, so that it might all pass as a drunken orgy.

Then he sent thieves to our capital city, five hundred miles away, to steal the necessary instruments. Thereafter, always alone, that his knowledge might remain a secret, he tapped wires and learned the Government's plans. In great emergencies, he issued orders, properly signed, to generals and governors. Thus, when he was about to capture our capital, he first ordered movements of Government troops to places where he met and destroyed them; then he cut the wires.

Long before that, he had undermined the Government by forging insulting messages between officials, or refusals by generals to obey the Dictator. These

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messages, though disclaimed or apologized for by the formula, 'I was drunk,' were never forgotten, and many able generals went the way of the buzzards because of them.

5. THE ANGER OF RICO

When Rico captured the capital city of his province, he first divided among his army what he chose to take from that city, but did no other harm until he came to the palace of the governor who had torn down his father's house.

Stone by stone, he had this palace torn down, and sowed the site with salt, swearing to the citizens that if the blade of a plant ever grew thereon, he would destroy their city and all in it. With fear at first, the inhabitants did as ordered; later, as Rico became almost a god among us, with pride. The barren site of that palace is still called 'The Anger of Rico.'

Rico himself once described what happened on the night after the battle:

'La Gloria threw over her neck and wound around her bare breasts the string of great pearls which she had snatched from the dead body of the Governor's wife, saying: "Am I not beautiful?" She fondled these jewels, before the mirror in front of which also, doubtless, the Governor's wife, in whose blood they had recently been drenched, had stood to admire them, and I shuddered. No thought had she of the dead who had worn them, nor of those who would thus fondle these same pearls when she, also, rotted without them.'

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‘People talk much of man’s cruelty, but an ambitious woman is without honesty, pity, or shame. I kill to aid my career, which is essential to my country; I have been cruel when maddened by treachery; but La Gloria and her like do in cold blood, and without afterthought, things the memory of which causes me to sweat in my dreams.

‘A woman is like a high-bred horse, which prances when a silver saddle is thrown on its back, with no thought for the dead steed from which its finery came, nor for the rider’s blood still sticky upon saddle-blankets and *tapaderos*.’ *

6. THE VALUE OF SUPERSTITION

‘His Saint protects him.’ So it was whispered among all our people, and Rico too well understood the value of superstition to deny the proper credit to his Saint.

He had also the reputation of being favored by the Ancient Powers. One hireling with dagger raised to kill fell paralyzed over him, and Rico sleepily called to his men who rushed to protect him:

‘Lay this fool in the House of the Wizard. His brain still lives, and the Wizard, my great-grandfather, will worry the Son of a Goat properly before the Slow Death finally ends him.’

This tale quickly spread throughout my country and made hopeless those hired to kill him, and as hopeless those who, from political hatred, attempted

* Stirrup-covers.

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his death. Not that such desperate attempts ceased, but assassins planned with fear in their hearts, and, certain that they were about to fail, necessarily did fail. And when superstition did not foil plots against him, fate or luck, or what we hesitate to call a Higher Power or God, seemed to intervene. All came, therefore, to believe him protected. By the Crimson Bird, asserted our Indians: by Wizards, believed our half-breeds: by Rico's mother, animating Ismael's body with supernatural wisdom, believed many.

And this reputation helped to make him Dictator and to bring about him the fearless men who aided his career.

7. RICO'S CHARM

Rico's smile was frank, persuasive, and, above all, so charming that few men and no women could resist it. One of his historians has pointed out that, with the exception of the Argentine Miss, none of those who conspired against him — and they were many — had ever talked to him. It is true that the sinister Northern Governor who succeeded him knew him well; but I regard it as established that he succeeded Rico without having conspired against him.

Rico's enemies insist that he was a great actor, using his powers of dissimulation to lure men and women to their destruction. But Rico's friends maintain that his smile revealed the real man, hiding behind that mask which great rulers must

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wear if they are to continue to govern. Rico was well aware that the essential isolation of his position at all times threatened him and that his fall would destroy not only himself but all about him, including the peace and prosperity his drastic methods had brought into existence out of anarchy. Forever in conflict with the petty ambitions of unscrupulous politicians, he became hardened into a semblance of volcanic rock, which has been thrust up by seismic energy, scarred and driven into itself by the compressive forces of its emergence, and yet, by the very hardness thus acquired, enabled to endure.

8. RICO'S FEAR

It was a peculiarity of Rico's, from the beginning of his career as a bandit, that he allowed only his trusted bodyguard to stand behind him, and that he shook hands with no one and objected to being touched.

La Amalia, one of his mistresses after he became President, left behind in her memoirs an instance which terrified her and resulted in her dismissal. (These memoirs are well worth reading, but so objectionable to recent dictators that it is impossible to obtain copies in my country.) Stealing up quietly behind him in her bare feet, she clasped his arms and called 'Horico!' She relates that she was thrown completely across the room and would probably have been killed by his knife-thrust had it not been that in her fall she upset a table, which covered her until his mind understood it was not an attempt

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at assassination. Nevertheless, she was bundled out of the Palace half-naked that night, and never again allowed to speak to him.

Some said his objection to being touched was an instinct which he inherited from his father; others, that fear governed all his actions. But a curious type of fear it must have been, for from the age of sixteen he was foremost in every battle in which his troops were engaged and until the Battle of the Banners, which made his life essential to our country, he never sent a man into any danger which he had not first tried out himself.

CHAPTER VII

RICO'S RISE TO POWER

I. THE BATTLE OF THE BANNERS AND THE DEATH OF LA GLORIA

'WE ALL pray at some time in our lives,' said Rico. 'I, who have always found it more profitable to trust to myself than to God, prayed once, when I was seventeen.

'At the Battle of the Banners, when a cavalry charge of the *Corps d'Élite*, of enemy officers only, who had sworn to kill me or die *en masse*, nearly overwhelmed me and my guard, La Gloria jumped her horse in front of me and formed a barrier which saved my life.

'I struck down the enemy captain who attacked her, but it was too late: La Gloria lay dying, also. I rearranged her head as comfortably as might be, propping it on the dead body of the captain. Blood still spurted on her loosened hair from the sword wound I had given him, and occasionally his death tremors shook her. Seated on a corpse which yesterday's sun had made round, and at the narrow top of a hillock already overcrowded with dead, I held her hand. Her grip on mine was that of a scared child, and, as she had saved my life, I could not leave her, though my men were being slaughtered

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about me, and, lacking my leadership, the battle's outcome was uncertain.

'In a circle around me, my bodyguard fought off the *Corps d'Élite*. The circle narrowed as my guard perished, assaulted by cavalry in overwhelming numbers. From an inner rank, one of the Atlan men, wounded fatally in the neck by a sword-thrust, pushed out and ran amuck through the circling enemy horsemen. He slashed with his heavy *machete* at riders' legs, always advancing, as he cleared space around him, into the crush of sabring officers and rearing horses. A horse, with ribs bared and entrails dragging from the *machetaza* which had cost its rider his leg, reared and struck the Atlañeno on the head. Stunned, well-nigh bled to death, lacking the strength to lift his *machete*, the man had still the will to shorten his *machete*, rest its point on the belly of a fallen officer, and fall upon his knife's handle, so that by his weight he killed the colonel below him.

'"Atlan, Atlan!" shouted the Atlan bravos, and even my own countrymen shouted "Atlan, Atlan!" I had not the heart to stop their shouting, though my rule has always been that we fight silently.

'"A dog which growls while battling is always beaten," I tell my men. But this Atlañeno had died as a man should die, and perhaps their applause eased his death-throes.

'Before me, Ismael, superbly naked, a sword in each hand, stood on La Gloria's dead horse, his uniform cut to ribbons by enemy swords, and pulled

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off him by officers who, in dying, reached to catch him down. An officer jumped his horse over the barrier of dead that Ismael had accumulated before him; slashing the horse's throat with his sword so that it fell backward, Ismael exclaimed: "Adieu, General!" and pierced its rider's belly.

"Adieu, Ismael!" called the General, firing his pistol point-blank at him, so close that it charred his hat, though it did not harm him.

From a score of wounds, Ismael's blood rained down, and drop by drop fell loudly upon my head. I still hear these drops at times and shall always hear them. They have worn furrows in my brain. His hat was still red from pistol fire, and of a mind that burst into flame, but he thought only of killing the brave men who strove to reach me.

"I, for my part, sat still by the side of the dying girl, and yet I died with each of my soldiers who perished, and at each wound Ismael received, I saw my own blood run.

"God of the Crimson Bird," I prayed, "save Ismael!"

"La Gloria, always fiercely jealous, turned to me in almost her last moment of consciousness, and murmured: "You love me, Rico?"

"Now, one lies to a woman of necessity. I descended from Satan and Eve, whom he seduced when she sinned at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, women take from the Father of Lies the need for both speaking and hearing untruth. I lied to La Gloria, who had twice saved my life, and we

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lay dying because too brave on my behalf, I could not lie. Therefore, I could only reply:

“A man loves but once, and I loved my mother.”

She raised her head and spat at me: at me, who for years had cared for her and to ease her passing risked my whole career! But such are women — for love they live, for love they die. An idea, a principle, is foreign to them. It was contempt that I would not lie to her that caused her venom. But to a woman who would so soon carry this lie to Heaven — how could I?

The effort was too much for La Gloria, and her handclasp, which had been half fear of death and half love, relaxed. She was dead and I free, free to wonder dimly as I fought how a woman who so loved me could have held me there, to almost certain death and probable defeat. Thenceforth, I rode with Ismael on my left and my guard massed on each side, while the men of Atlan protected our rear. Thus we galloped through the enemy, killing all who met us. Back and forth we went, until our horses could only trot, and we, with swords set as lances, killed fugitives too exhausted by hours of battle to notice what was happening. For each drop of Ismael's blood, I killed a man, and would have killed a score could I have raised my arm, stiffened by striking, or could my horse have galloped.

That night, Ismael controlled my army, but gave only one order: “Kill all who wear gold lace, and spare all in private's uniform!” I, for my part, lay drunk with the *aguardiente* they forced down my

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throat to save my reason, and yet all night I dreamed that through eternity I sat in Hell, holding a girl's hand, while about me my chosen guard died, and Ismael's blood fell drop by drop, calling death for those who wounded him.

'La Gloria's body, you ask? Yes, it lay where she died, and we fought backward and forward over it until dark. Having risked my career to ease her last moments, was I also to give my life to save the shell? Possibly she would have expected it, for thus are women, but I, who at twenty was Dictator of my country, had other things to think of.'

2. THE DEATH OF GENERAL CULEBRON

'What is the truth about the death of General Culebron?' The German traveler hesitated as he asked the question, for he was aware that he might be giving serious offense.

'He was, next to Antonio Silva,' replied Rico, 'that one of my countrymen I most admired. He was brilliant, highly educated, a military genius, and a general at twenty-eight. Above all, he was a man of untarnished honor. During my revolution, when he served under the late President, we had of course corresponded, as generals of opposing forces always do in my country. But he had refused my offers, saying:

'"To desert my Commander is not permissible. However, if you capture me, and become President yourself, I will serve under you. Will you serve under me if you are beaten?"'

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‘And I answered: “No, for I am not a man who can serve.”

‘General Culebron was ordered by the President to lead his army out of the capital to suppress my revolt. I have seen the order he received, signed by the President, in our state archives. Once outside the capital, the President arrested him for attempting with his army to join my forces. As he stood facing the firing-squad, he took off his cap, and, waving it at a friend who stood near, called:

‘“This is the best joke ever played on me!” and fell dead.

‘It was freely said by the President’s party that I had sent to the President a treasonable letter from General Culebron to me, and that it was on this evidence that he was shot. The only communication I had with our late President was a letter from him, offering to surrender without terms provided I guaranteed him, alone, safe passage to Europe. I made no answer, for I had already dug his grave.

‘General Culebron was a great loss to our country, but only one of the talented officials assassinated by that tyrant who, fearing all men abler than himself, killed off my competitors for me, and at the same time deprived himself of invaluable aid in suppressing my revolt. General Prieto, an able though not a great man, was poisoned by the President’s order. Prieto’s chief of staff, that tactician whom the world lamented, fled into the mountains — not to join me but to escape death; most unfortunately for my country, death overtook him. The

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President hurriedly had him shot before his influential friends could make protests.

‘And yet, though all these dastardly crimes were clearly the work of the late General-President, many still accuse me of having committed them.’

3. THE BATTLE OF SANTA YSABEL

‘The Battle of Santa Ysabel you would have enjoyed,’ said Rico to the German historian. ‘A regiment had been carried from me by its officers. As you know, in our armies a regiment is always devoted to its commander, but seldom knows why it fights. Therefore, having first killed off with sharp-shooters all the old and tried officers of that regiment, I sent spies among the men, who, disgusted with the recently appointed officers they scarcely knew by sight, killed them, and the whole regiment returned to me.

‘At Santa Ysabel, in a famous *hacienda* house with walls two feet thick and bullet-proof, the reigning President with his staff had taken refuge. I formed the re-won regiment in an open square surrounding the buildings, and I marched them at a slow walk into these. One man in every three was killed by rifle fire from the pierced walls. It was a beautiful sight. The survivors were so filled with pride that they demanded the regimental name of Santa Ysabel, which I granted them, with perpetual extra pay.

‘What did I do with my prisoners? But, my friend, why should there be prisoners? There were only

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officers in that house and they would have led revolts against me some other day. Besides, could you take from a regiment which left two-thirds in dead or wounded on the battlefield the pleasure of killing? If you sneak a mouse from a cat, you save that which is merely destructive, and discourage the cat from catching other mice.

‘On the contrary, I gave to each man in the regiment the right to wear at dress parade the uniform of some officer he had killed. Therefore, when presently I march this regiment before you, you will see the color-guard, picked men, dressed in uniforms of every rank from that of president down — not new uniforms, mind you, but the very ones taken from the dead, still stained with their blood and torn by bayonet thrusts. Believe me, they are proud, these men. As I ride before them, they imagine the presidential salute to be as much for them as for me.

‘Once a year, I dine in the great hall of my palace all survivors of Santa Ysabel, seated as their uniforms demand. I drink once to their luck in surviving, and then they drink the night away. Thus I have made fanatic fighters of my army, whose only fear is to die disgraced.’

‘May I ask one last question?’ asked the German traveler.

‘A dozen,’ answered Rico. ‘I so seldom find an intelligent man to whom I can speak freely that you are a blessing. It is difficult to live alone and think alone, and pay no attention to those many calumnies

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which have been heaped upon me simply because I began life as a bandit.'

Rico waited for some answering courtesy of speech, such as would have come instantly from a Spanish-American, and a secretary, present at the interview, noted that his face clouded for a second as the question alone followed.

'Does it not injure army prestige when the soldiers wear the uniforms of the officers they have killed?' continued the traveler, unconscious of Rico's thoughts.

'Yes, it might, if things were as they used to be, and I dressed like a monkey on a stick, to be jerked by a string in the hands of politicians. But you have never seen me in other costume than that I now wear—a plain undress uniform. My officers wear the same. If the soldiers do not know their officers without gold lace and stars, I shoot the officers for neglect of duty.'

4. RICO IS ELECTED PRESIDENT

'An election was necessary to legalize my position as Dictator, not at home, of course, for here we know elections for what they are—a farce by which we appeal to the hypocrisy of our neighbors and of Europe. Therefore, I sent for Ignacio, one of the old conservatives of Spanish blood, and said to him, "Don Ignacio, I saved your life in the Revolution." This was not quite true, for he had been in Paris when the Battles of the Banners and of Santa Ysabel nearly destroyed our Spanish nobility. All I had done was to permit him to return when I needed a

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few old families about me to answer those who accused me of massacring the upper classes. "Of your lands, I saved for you a third. Now I ask a favor."

'And he bowed his head, replying: "It is difficult to deny aught to the General."

'At which we both laughed, but not whole-heartedly. I feared refusal, since the essence of government is to make it unsafe for anyone to refuse, and yet I knew that these old Spaniards are too proud to consider safety; and he, on the other hand, having been much taunted for retaining a part of his lands when his neighbors lost all, feared to pay too much for life and property.

'"I am about to be elected President," I said, "and so particular is the Great Republic of the North that they think an election, to be legal, must have two candidates. *Ojala*, let us have two. Oblige me by running against me." He straightened himself proudly, but his eyes were startled. He was not afraid, but astonished.

'"No!" I reassured him. "It is true that before me it has been the custom to kill one's rival, should there be one, after the election, certainly, and, if convenient, before the voting. But now all is altered. I wish to make a gesture which shall appeal to all civilization. Therefore, you shall have enough votes to maintain self-respect and I, having been elected by a great majority, will implore you to unite our country by becoming head of my cabinet as Secretary of State."

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““And in the canvass I may say what I feel to be the truth?”

““In moderation,” I assured him blandly. “As gentleman toward gentleman, fighting each in his way for the good of our common country, but not, if you will kindly oblige me, rekindling those still red-hot embers of civil strife, over which I have created peace.”

‘He sighed deeply, but so it was arranged, nor could I have found a better man.’

CHAPTER VIII

DON IGNACIO'S DAUGHTER

I. THE PIQUE-NIQUE¹

'WHEN I had been Dictator for five years,' said Rico, 'I had pretty well exterminated those who objected to me as President, though of course there is an annual crop of malcontents which must be harvested annually or they grow numerous enough to cause rebellion. To that I object, for it wastes my time and causes trouble for my peasantry, who follow their leaders, quite without regard for profit or loss on their own account.

'There came to me at that time word that my Secretary of State was seriously ill, and requested my presence. I went, for Don Ignacio was an old and useful man who had lived much in foreign courts and knew better than I at that time how to manage the diplomatic corps. This Corps is always troublesome to a weak state surrounded by powerful neighbors, all looking wistfully at our mahogany forests and restless because I will not create new wants among my people, in order to increase trade with foreign manufacturers. Also, his sense of humor was akin to mine, and that made me fond of him.

¹ *Pique-nique* — Picnic. A Spanish-American word borrowed from the English, but with spelling changed to suit Spanish ears, A. de F. B.

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‘He had married a brilliant woman for her beauty, and, when she was forty, found himself in possession of a mountain of flesh combined with a restless disposition and a determination to leave a record in my country’s history. She was, however, wise enough not to urge her husband toward the presidency, for which I was glad, since it would have hurt me to have him shot.

‘My guard waited for me in the palace of the Secretary of State while I went upstairs with his wife, and Ismael followed behind me. Entering his room, I found Don Ignacio in bed. Having greeted me he said to his wife: “Leave us now, madame. We have affairs of importance to discuss.”

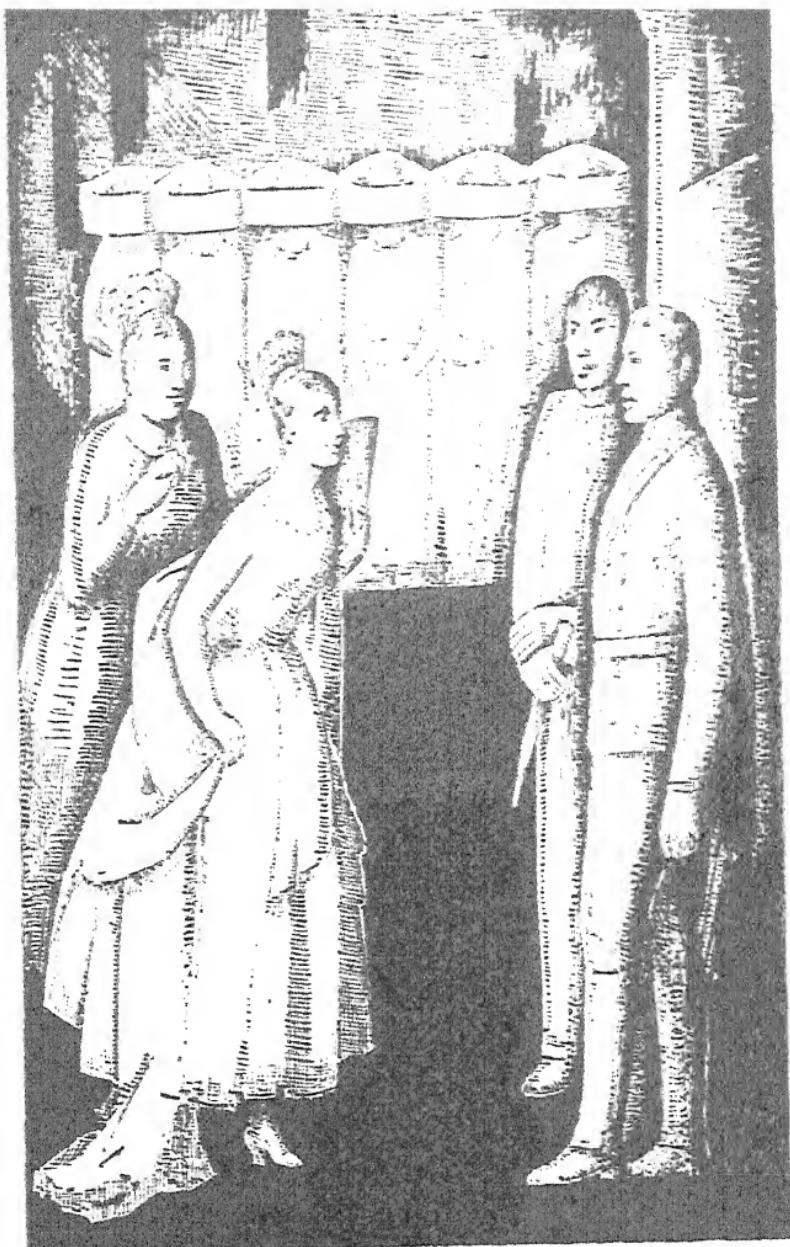
‘She went so reluctantly that Ismael stood by the open door until she had gone downstairs.

‘“Your ear for a moment,” requested the Secretary, and Ismael, following me to the bedside, drew his sword, for long ago a President was thus assassinated by his Secretary of State, who summoned him to a pretended sick-bed.

‘“Not this time, Ismael,” smiled the sick man, “though it is true that my sickness is only assumed. I wished to warn you against my daughter. She is what she is, and my wife has arranged my illness that you may meet her as you go down. But not a word about this warning.”

‘And we talked of affairs rather loudly, lest his wife have returned to the door.

‘With curiosity, I went downstairs and found the daughter standing with her mother at the entrance.



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A slender girl of sixteen with her mother's earlier beauty and her father's cynical humor, she made me a curtsy such as she had learned for presentation at foreign courts. Ismael, behind me, rattled his sword.

“Do not be afraid, Rico,” the girl exclaimed, her black eyes sparkling. “I am too young to be dangerous.” Now I was also young and resented her infringement of my dignity in calling me “Rico” instead of the correct ‘Señor Presidente.’ So I answered:

“And later, señorita?” with a glance at her mother, who weighed nearly three hundred pounds. (That is the trouble with our tropical women — they take on fat from too much food and no exercise.) The girl drew back haughtily, but her mother, horrified at her daughter’s remark, made many apologies for her manners. Then, as if it were an afterthought instead of her main purpose, she said:

“We are giving a *pique-nique* on the fourteenth. May we not hope that you will accept an invitation, so that my daughter may apologize for her thoughtlessness?”

Conscious of having been a barbarian in reminding the girl that she too would one day be encased in fat, I accepted, and rode home with a very sullen Ismael maltreating his horse behind me.

Even my few friends among the upper classes keep their daughters out of my sight, for I am of bad reputation. (Though, Heaven knows, I have never chosen my mistresses from among these girls, who, when young, respect no man, and, when old,

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are an offence to the eye.) Yet Don Ignacio's wife had determined that her daughter should marry me, who have no more use for a wife than for a pet monkey. For no one woman can be a good wife and a pleasure to the eye for more than five years. After that, she is mother only. Why, then, should I bother to marry? It is a different matter in a peasant's cottage, where the woman works equally with the man; where, if the wife dies, the husband mourns, saying:

“Where shall I again find a woman who cooks so well? Who will now keep my children from being a trouble to me? How can I, no longer young, cause any woman to love me? To my wife, I was accustomed. But those of her age do not attract me, nor do I attract youth. If I found a girl to marry me, before long she would deceive me with some young man, and I become a laughing-stock, afraid to know her sin, yet never easy for a moment, while she was out of my sight.”

‘But for any except a peasant, marriage is foolish. To marry a woman of the upper classes is to carry through life a needless burden.

‘For the girl herself, it would not have been a bad speculation. The average life of a dictator in my country is under five years. During that time, he always accumulates some millions abroad on which his wife can live in comfort and marry a title if so minded. And it is not etiquette to kill the wife when the President is disposed of. (Only sons of fighting age are killed, for they would be dangerous

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to the new President; and, consequently, they are usually kept in Spain during their father's presidency.)

'My spies reported to me that this picnic created more excitement than had ever before been known in my capital, for it was freely said that I would select my wife there. Every mother with a beautiful daughter dressed and trained her for the assault upon me — or rather, on my Palace, for it was the Palace that attracted them. Where daughters were lacking, nieces or grand-daughters were brought out.

'The picnic was as all picnics, I fancy, though never before or later did I attend one. Truly, I have lived in the open for years and in dry weather prefer the shade of a tree. But a picnic is neither a camp nor a home. Servants were everywhere. Two or three of them carefully let down on a rug each of the older women, holding them by elbows and backs until they were easily seated. The girls were up and down perpetually, to show their slender grace and the flexibility of their muscles. Food was everywhere, flies abounded, and ants were not unworthy of their reputation. Chattering was incessant except in my presence, for silence fell on her at whom I looked, as if she were waiting for my glove to fall, and on her competitors, lest I had selected her to rule them.

'Several might have been persuaded to enter my palace by the back door, provided the settlement was satisfactory, but I would have had to find places for worthless relations, which I will not do. Not a word of interest, not a symptom of good-fellowship,

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no real affection for anyone did I see or hear on that picnic — only suspicion, ambition, and jealousy.

‘A lizard, unaccustomed to so much company, created more excitement than the attack on my camp at the House of the Wizard, where, when we had killed all those of our attackers who did not run away, we settled down quietly to our supper, growling perhaps at our wounds, or discussing the good qualities of our dead, but calmly. Every girl screamed if the lizard were near her, and still more if it were not, lest all eyes be centered on that fortunate girl who had cause to scream. The older women, too bulky to rise, gathered their skirts around them and reviled their servants for having left a lizard alive in the whole world. When it was killed and exhibited to allay all doubt, that young devil, the Secretary of State’s black-eyed daughter, ran a slender stick through the leaves, that by its rustling the older women might again be made uneasy. She winked at me, and I laughed, though I prefer quiet, well-bred women who are silent except when spoken to.

‘That night, I went in to see La Faquita, and found her at times sullen with fear (for the gossip had penetrated everywhere) and at times over-anxious to please me. At last, I said: “When I am tired of you, Faquita, you shall be married to a worthy man who will value you for what you bring, not be jealous when you boast of my Palace. As for these others — no more picnics.” At which she became herself again.

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“Thus I abandoned all amusements as unworthy of a man. What can any man desire more than his work, and conversation with those who really know that of which they speak? Those tea-drunkards who love to gabble to a circle of admiring women, or the vicious who seek women to seduce them — they are not men. Men should amuse themselves alone, and women gabble to themselves alone. Were it not the fashion to converse with men, no woman would talk to a man except when she sought marriage, or had a request or complaint.”

2. THE ORDER OF THE TWO YSABELS

“Since Don Ignacio’s daughter had failed to marry me, it became necessary, for my friend’s sake, to provide occupation for both wife and daughter.

““Help me, Rico, or I perish,” he said to me. “Send me to China, or anywhere, for at home I live in Hell.”

““I shall arrange a decoration,” I said.

““But that you dislike and forbid.””

““Not for women,” I replied. “When enemies are too powerful, set them to fighting among themselves; that has always been my principle. Women would always rather fight among themselves than worry us. They have their own system of warfare, and half our trouble is that we cannot understand why they fight, nor how.””

““But how will a decoration set them fighting?”” he queried.

““I have already tried it once, and since all

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women are alike, it will work again," I answered. "In my brigand days, I established the Order of the Cartridge to be given for one week only to that wife of one of my followers who best provided for her man. The decoration was a bright red ribbon in which was rolled an empty cartridge, which, I told them, had killed my most hated enemy, the former governor of my state. Satan alone knows whom this cartridge had really killed, for, having forgotten that I needed one, I picked up a stray at the last moment. I inspected my band weekly, and on the wife of the cleanest and sleekest of my followers, I pinned the order. It was a great success; the camp became a model for all, and my men beyond words contented. Soon the decoration was so highly prized that a woman who lost it in a night attack on my camp pursued and killed two soldiers of the enemy who were carrying it away with them."

"Excellent!" laughed my Secretary of State.

"Keep shut thy mouth, and leave the affair to me," I continued.

"Thus was established my Order of the Two Ysabels, to be given at the end of each year to those two women over sixteen who most deserved it.

"Why two Ysabels?" asked the Secretary of State. "And how shall they deserve it?"

"Why one Ysabel?" I replied. "And God alone knows how they will deserve it."

"To the wife of the Secretary of State I caused it to be whispered that she and her daughter should first have the decoration if I could influence the

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commission, who were all women and therefore intent on giving it to themselves.

'To Ismael, I said: "Whisper to the wife of my Secretary of War that I am intent on seeing that she and her daughter get the decoration first."

'How we laughed at the idea of Ismael, who hated all women, on such an errand; but he rather enjoyed it, saying: "You have set these females such a fight that you are safe for a year at least."

'And so it was, since no woman knew for what merit the decoration was awarded, and each was so intent on keeping her pet enemy from being decorated that she had no time to think of marrying me or of worrying her husband.'

3. THE PASHA KEEPS PEACE

'Later, when I had learned how best to keep my diplomatic corps contented, I sent Don Ignacio as ambassador to Turkey, where his wife died, though not before achieving the fame she sought as the fattest woman in that country.

'His daughter married a Pasha of Three Tails,¹ as help toward a book to be called "Within and Without the Harem": she was beaten into subjection by two eunuchs with bastinados, while a third sat on her shoulder blades. My minister sent me an official report on this system of subduing women by the Sultan's Chief Eunuch, who highly recom-

¹ Pasha of Three Tails — Insignia of rank in Turkey. Turkish chieftains in the old days wore horsetails, three tails indicating an official of the highest rank. A. de F. B.

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mended his method. Unfortunately, it is unsuited to our civilization though no better way presents itself.

‘In the end, the girl started a rebellion in the Pasha’s harem, and was bagged and drowned in the Bosphorus with a dozen or so of her disciples.

‘Never have I seen a more contented man than my minister to Turkey when he returned to my capital. “Life is so without care,” he said to me, “that soon I shall be as fat as my lamented dear wife. As for my unfortunate daughter — well, the right of the husband exceeds that of the father, and the Pasha keeps peace in his family, as I never could. I saw her but once after her marriage. She was in a luxurious carriage, lolling on the back seat with two of the Pasha’s other wives. A *yashmak* hid the lower part of her face, but I knew her instantly by her restless eyes and nervous motions.

‘“I could not salute her, for the crowd around me, who might have thought that I was attempting to flirt with the Pasha’s wives, and might have maltreated me. Certainly the watchful eunuchs would have held the women responsible for such an insult to their master. In Turkey, it is taken for granted that women wait only for a chance to be insulted.

‘“She noticed me as I passed, and leaned forward to look out of her carriage window. Immediately, the eunuch footman on her side of the carriage slashed the window opening with the long whiplash he always carried for such emergencies, and by ill-luck, the tip caught her nose, poorly protected by her veil.

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..“That woman will be whipped when she gets home,” said my dragoman. “Her nose belongs to her husband, and by her heedlessness she has injured his property.” And he shrugged his shoulders at the carelessness of women.’

CHAPTER IX

REBELLION OF THE TRIPLETS

‘AT TWENTY-SIX,’ said Rico to the German traveler, ‘I had taken on fat and become listless and slow. I was approaching the stage at which by cruelty I would have shown fear of my successor — for cruelty, except in anger, is a product of fear, and fear the result of inferiority.

‘Then came Antonio Silva, the only unselfish man I have ever known, and saved me from myself. He came of a family which at times in the past had dictated to dictators (which implies great tact and various other qualities). For generations, the Silvas, owning vast estates in the Tierra Caliente, had made fortunes in mahogany and coffee. Living simply on their land, they had spent little, investing huge sums in other countries where occasionally they lived.

‘Antonio was the first-born of triplet brothers. The second brother was a miser, and stole where he safely could. The third brother sought power by any means. It would seem that all the good of the family went into the first-born, while the second took only that love of money which had made them rich, and the third, the family love of power.

‘Absent when I assumed the dictatorship, Antonio wrote asking my permission to return. He wished to invest in his native country, under my enlightened

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régime, the millions his family had acquired there. But he warned me that he planned not to seek greater wealth but to raise the condition of the peasantry, by building roads, bridges, houses, and hospitals.

“Come,” I answered. “What could be better? But do not bring your brothers.”

‘For five years, he worked and spent, and by his philanthropy the people prospered, and my country grew rich.

‘You, who are of the German Nation, which through the centuries has respected and profited by rulers as absolute as I, must laugh to think that in deference to the stupid prejudices prevailing in the Great Republic of the North, I must hold an election every six years. You who know how our elections are arranged must laugh even more that anyone should think them significant; nevertheless, there is in them a danger to all. For ungrateful and unruly factions, led by small men who seek only a chance to rob on a large scale, use them to resist me, their rightful ruler.

‘Antonio Silva was the complaisant candidate against me in the second election, as Don Ignacio had been in the first. On the eve of election, we dined at the Palace with a great company of distinguished co-patriots. As I was about to raise my glass, one of Doña Atlan’s men (of those six she sends me every year) touched my right arm and said:

“A moment,” and I, having made my excuses, went with him, because knowing her and her men, I never neglect their warnings.

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“Had you drunk,” he said, “you would now be dead.”

“Poison!” I cried. “But, God in Heaven, not Antonio?”

“Neither dead nor responsible,” he explained, “but his brothers have returned, and you have been asleep. ‘When the master grows fat, his slaves grow lazy;’ so says my mistress.”

“Mother of God! How I hated that Old Spider of Atlan! To call me fat! She who for forty years has tried in all ways, even by magic, to take on fat. Nearly my height, and weighing but ninety pounds, her face a death’s head with a little skin drawn tightly over it — a creature from whom all men turn in as much horror as they dare show, but who, when young, prinked and pranced daily to attract men. Failing to be even decently plump, herself, she calls me fat!

“Your Excellency’s guard should enter first,” suggested the Atlan man. Again, I mentally cursed that Old Witch of Atlan, for I knew that she had said to this man: “The fat are cowardly. Guard him well.”

‘But I thrust him aside and led the way in. At the door, I called:

“Gentlemen, these whelps of Satan have tried to poison me! Touch nothing! Keep your seats!”

‘Antonio Silva, ever the most devoted of my friends, took my goblet of wine, and, raising it to his lips, cried, “To your good health, General!”

“At another time, Antonio,” I cried, “but in

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the name of San Bonifacio, set that poison down! Never have I needed you more than now. Come with me to the balcony, that we may show these poisoners that I am alive and we still friends," I continued, for I felt that his brothers hoped that I would kill him before I died, and thus leave them masters of the country.

"The square outside my Palace was crowded, but quiet even when I appeared, for my Indians are silent; it is only half-breeds who cheer tonight those they tomorrow will gladly yelp at, while tearing them to pieces.

"Friends," I called, "an attempt has been made to poison Don Antonio and myself, but we have escaped." Then came a rifle shot, and Antonio Silva fell back dead in my arms.

"Kill his brothers; they have killed our benefactor," I shouted, for in the brilliantly lighted square, I could see the two younger of the triplets escaping while a score of their Indian tenants held back the mob. These Indians perished to a man, torn limb from limb, but the two criminals went free.

"Then came a year when my back was to the wall, for the Silva brothers had unlimited money for arms, and the world believed that I had killed Antonio, and denied me everything. Little happened that would interest you, a trained soldier, as are all Germans. When I could, I choose as battlefield a plain with high trees, and therein placed sharpshooters with our best rifles, and orders to kill all commissioned officers. Then, as we surged backward

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and forward, like ocean waves in a great storm, these sharpshooters destroyed officers faster than they could be replaced and the men, left leaderless, gradually ceased to fight. In the end, I triumphed, for my people already loved me.

‘When the war was over, and I again seated in my Palace, I said to one of the Atlan bodyguard:

“Say to your mistress: ‘Why did you so long delay your warning to me?’” And he brought this answer from her:

“You needed a jolt to save your soul. You were fat and lazy, and slow of thought and action, having known too great luxury and too many women. Keep thin, or I will send a better man to succeed you. As for your governors and generals and secretaries who perished in the war, they were *cebones*.¹ Had they been valuable, they would have known of this plot before I did. But, in fact, many of them did know, but waited to side with the winner. Send me thanks for riding you of such trash, and hereafter employ young men. When over twenty-four, a man is fit only to die!”

‘And I was then over thirty. Judge how I hated this old termagant, when one of my own bodyguard repeated such a message to me!

‘One thing especially saddens me about the death of Antonio Silva. He spent millions to raise conditions among my peasantry, and now all is as it was before he began. I have spent more energy than he spent millions in continuing his work, but uselessly.

¹ Fat hogs.

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Life is too easy in our tropics to be made easier by philanthropy.

‘In one instance, I did far more harm than good by my efforts. I built a hundred miles of road into the Jungle; that is to say, I bridged the rivers strongly and placed a little crushed stone on the widened jungle paths between bridges. *Bien*. I was happy. I was a benefactor of my people.

‘The next year, came an old friend, like myself formerly a bandit, but become a prosperous farmer.

‘“Comrade,” he said, “you are in danger.”

‘“From whom?” I asked.

‘“From me.” I laughed, for he had served under me, and I trusted him as I did my left hand — though not my right arm, of course.

‘“Shall I have you shot?” I asked, and made a sign to Ismael.

‘“Choose for yourself.” And he too laughed. “But there are many hundred old comrades along your road who will attend my funeral. The affair is this: formerly, we and our families bought necessities at local stores. Now, thanks to your *maldito*¹ road, we must come each year to your capital where our women spend all we have on what they do not need. Thus we become poorer each year. The silver which should be buried against a time of real necessity, is spent for nothing, in your capital. Our local storekeepers starve, and in our houses we have ribbons instead of food.”

‘“Very well,” I replied; “let all my friends on this

¹ Accursed.

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road start for the capital just before the next great rain. Camp between the two longest bridges, and Ismael shall see that they are carried away by the following flood. But keep shut your mouths, or your women will force me to rebuild them. Otherwise, a month of camp life in rain and mud will destroy their love of city journeys."

'Thereafter, I built no roads, and my country has prospered and is contented and happy. My people play their *tocadors*² and dance at night certainly, and by day if they choose. If a people is happy, what more do they need? By harsh commands, to be healthy, to be rich, I should only make them unhappy. Here at least we have no hunger, no misers, no men who work day and night, when an hour or two gives all they need. Besides, you and other travelers tell me that the peasantry of other countries is often hungry, always worried, seldom happy. What does it profit a people to have new wants thrust upon them if thereby they lose that joy in life they already possess?'

² Any musical instrument held in hand or arm and played by the fingers. Usually a stringed instrument.

CHAPTER X

THE ARGENTINE MISS

THE German Minister was Rico's only intimate friend among diplomats at our capital, and in that chapter of his memoirs entitled 'Recollections of a Benevolent Dictator' he fully endorses Rico's statements about the Argentine Miss. Nothing else has been published at home or abroad regarding her, though at the time no incident created, among the few who heard of it, such intense and unjust hatred of Rico.

'The affair began early one morning by a telegraphic request from the President of a neighboring republic, asking my permission,' said Rico, 'to cross my border with his troops and exterminate about five hundred "White" refugees who had secretly gathered there to promote a counter-revolution in his republic.

'As their location was near the border of the Woman of Atlan's territory, I at once telegraphed to my representative there, instructing him to find out whether she would resent it if I gave my permission. (In the dialect of Atlan, this man is known as "Eyes and Ears," since he merely transmits reports and communications, but has no power to judge or act.) Within an hour after receiving my request, "Eyes and Ears" reported the Woman of Atlan as saying:

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“If a flea bites me, I crack it between my thumbnail and forefinger, but these fleas have not annoyed me. Why, therefore, should I crack them? Is that boy Rico become so fat and lazy that he asks me to catch his fleas for him? As for the Butcher of the South, if he comes into my land, I will cut slices from his fat hide to meat my pet song-bird. Sliced neatly and with care, the man might well last a month or two.”

“Therefore, I telegraphed the President of the neighboring republic that to cross my border meant war, which I would deplore, though possibly he more than I; but that if he would immediately concentrate troops on his own side of my frontier in ambush, I would drive the “Whites” across to him.

“To my General Escalon I also telegraphed the necessary instructions, and within a week all the “Whites” were dead, but not one died in my country. With revolutionists, I have no sympathy. Consider how much harm God did our world by not shooting Satan as soon as captured after his rebellion. (Not that he need have killed all those fallen women angels who followed Satan in his *pronunciamiento*. Leaders should always be executed, but their women I usually distribute among my troops.) I thought the matter ended, and dismissed it all from my mind, forgetting that in this life nothing is ever finished.

“Within six months there appeared in my capital a wealthy Argentine girl, who brought with her a chaperon, a maid, a cook, a house servant, and a driver — all women and liveried in Argentine colors. She took a fashionable apartment. Her horses were

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of the best. Her name was of the old nobility in her country, and she spent money as women spend it who have not earned it.

‘It did not then occur to me that the Argentine Minister was far away on vacation, and his First Secretary recently dangerously injured in a polo game. There remained, therefore, only the Second Secretary, a political appointment from an inland province, and so ignorant that he still took lessons in good Spanish. I held him guiltless in what followed, and merely requested his Government to send to their Legation thereafter only those born civilized.

‘As for myself, I am too well occupied to be interested in stray women, who, in general, travel because unwelcome at home. Possibly something may have been murmured to me about her by my Chief of Detectives, but if so, I neglected his information. Women, until they conspire, are unimportant. Their tongues usually waggle too freely for danger to come from them.

‘Some weeks later, as I rode our Avenida del Palacio, I saw La Gloria walking in all her magnificent beauty, and stopped so suddenly that my guard at a gallop behind me, nearly overrode me.

‘“Name of God!” I exclaimed to my Chief of Detectives, who took my left at once while Ismael guarded my right: “I saw La Gloria die years ago. She cannot be alive. Did you see her?”

‘“It is the Argentine Miss,” he explained to me.

‘“Follow her,” I ordered, “and report quickly.”

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For La Gloria was a pleasant memory, but undesirable now; too old, too wise, and always a devil, even when young. When I lay half insane with grief for my mother, La Gloria was just enough older than I to rule me. For my good, doubtless, but in the twenties one does not enjoy being reminded of a stick used against one in childhood. Also, when jealous, as she usually was, she handled a knife too deftly.

'The Chief reported: "I followed her carefully, but at her door she awaited me, bold as a Jungle-master, and ordered me to say to you: 'Not even Rico dares molest me. I am neither for his front door nor for the back.' With a sweeping bow, she went in, and from the windows came cackles of girls' laughter as she told her servants of me. Mother of God, these Argentinos must rear devils, not daughters! She is only sixteen, probably a virgin, of beautiful face and slender figure, and yet she knows the world."

'Thereafter people mentioned her to me. Even La Silva, my invaluable secretary, watching me closely, praised her beauty and manners, but deplored a boldness which we in my country do not like; for though the Argentine Miss never went out without her chaperon, nor ever rode with one man, still she was bold as an eaglet is bold, because it neither fears nor favors. I learned that she drank only that vile Yerba Mate, as the Argentines do, instead of coffee or tea, and used words like *bodega*¹ instead of

¹ Wineshop.

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pulperia. At lunches she was accustomed to compose clever verses¹ about events or the guests present, as do South Americans. But why she had come to my capital, no one could tell me.

‘Some time after, the Second Secretary of the Argentine Legation came to see me; when official business was over, he still stood waiting.

‘“What is it?” I asked roughly, for a poorly bred horse needs the spur.

‘“The Argentine Miss is related to a friend of yours,” he said diffidently.

‘“I have many acquaintances among your diplomats,” I answered coldly, for the rulers of Chile

¹ During my first exile, I spent a year in Paraguay, where this charming custom of verse-making taxed my brain. As we were sitting about the tea-table with Yerba Mate tea before us, Dolores suddenly composed four lines, well rhymed, accusing Concepción of having nearly fallen over her second-story balcony into my arms when I serenaded her the night before. Felipe immediately capped her verse, stating that I had forgotten Concepción’s name as I sang to her, and had had to substitute la-la-la.

Seeing my inability to reply promptly in verse, each seized some piece of tableware, and, pretending that it was a musical instrument, with his voice made appropriate sound. Felipe with two dinner-plates as cymbals gave the brass notes perfectly. Juan, with the edge of a knife passed over the belly of a spoon, added the music of a violin, and his voice did credit to a Stradivarius. Dolores picked at a fork instead of a guitar, and Concepción, using a pencil as fife, gave the essential high notes. The rest with tea-cups as drums so rendered the noble ‘Battle Hymn’ of my Republic that the tears started from my eyes. Then, seeing me ready, they closed with that clash of notes which indicates the final victorious cavalry charge, where sword meets sword and wails of the dying echo from violins.

Then I distinguished myself by a quatrain reproaching them with exposing a stranger in a single day to Yerba Mate (which I derived from *matar*, to kill) and the killing charms of Concepción. A. de F. B.

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and the Argentine are mere tools in the hands of the Great Republic of the North, which will not even share our ruin with them.

“A friend,” he persisted. And I knew then that he would soon be recalled, for a diplomat, unless he represents a Great Power, must have tact.

“Who?”

“La Gloria,” he answered, and flushed at my expression.

“How?”

“When a baby, La Gloria was stolen from her family, in my Republic, by an angry servant,” he replied.

“Tell the Argentina to call upon me with her proofs, and, if they are satisfactory, I will give her La Gloria’s pearls.” I spoke carelessly, but in reality I was greatly moved, for I owe much to La Gloria.

A week later there came to me a public writer, one of those men who in Spanish America sit at street corners and write letters from illiterates to illiterates, or for those who fear to sign what they wish to write. I saw him instantly, for through public writers many curious stories reach me, and not a little of great interest, for the public is credulous and careless, and seems to think itself governed by a Divine Providence which needs no thought to maintain itself. Even from the love-letters these men write, supposing them to be innocent, my secretaries sometimes find keys to ciphers or plots needing my care. They are paid according to the value of

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the information they bring me, or shot if they neglect their duty to me.

“ ‘The Argentine Miss sends me,’ said this public writer, ‘to say that she will receive you at any hour of any day Your Excellency may choose. She will be alone, if Your Excellency also comes alone. Nevertheless, if the General-President permits me, I do not trust her. We public writers are not without knowledge of women, for they often employ us for assignations they dare not themselves write. Such women come to us flushed, panting, ashamed, starting and looking behind them, until we must calm them or they will draw suspicion; or else cold, heartless, ready to give only because they take some man from his rightful woman, or because they may later blackmail some rich lover or boast of conquest. But this virgin of sixteen, finely bred, and with the world at her feet, spoke contemptuously:

“ ‘Tell Rico —’ she said, and her eyes were hard and cruel.

“ ‘I will write what you say,’ I suggested.

“ ‘Holy Virgin!’ she exclaimed, hesitating and flushing as if I had insulted her, ‘such a letter, and signed by me!’ Then recovering herself: ‘But this Rico is not a gentleman. He would show my letter to all his drunken companions.’

“ ‘*Patron*,’ the Public Writer continued, ‘what I write is business. Mine is an honorable profession and I must support my family; therefore, good or bad results do not concern me. But oral messages oppress me. I received from the Argentine Miss a

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sheaf of bills sufficient to overcome my reluctance this time. I know that the General-President is too cautious to write letters to such as she, and that therefore I shall have an oral message to carry from him to her. It is in my mind, however, that perhaps I shall know too much about this affair, and those too well informed do not live long.

“Now, all my life is in my boy, who with care and training will be the greatest public writer ever born. Truly, when he was three years old, his flourishes with a pencil were better than those of many who write on our streets. At six, he had already formed his *rubrica*,¹ so involuted, so complex and beautiful, that it resembled an eagle in full flight. If I die conveying these oral messages — *bien*, what of it? Am I not a man? But will my *Patron* then care for my boy — make him his slave, but train him so that his genius for writing may flourish as has the great genius of the General-President?”

“Go in peace,” I answered. “Thy boy shall be cared for whether or not my laws protect thee.” Then I hesitated, I who make it a rule never to think twice lest judgment rule my instinct. With

¹ An illiterate signs the letters written for him by public writers with his *rubrica*, which is a complicated scroll work, distinctive for each person and learned by all, literate or illiterate. The *rubrica* is binding without other signature; in fact, in many states a signature without *rubrica* is not binding, even for the literate.

The *rubrica* is placed outside, and the girl who receives such a letter breaks its seal, and, often without having it read to her, carries it in her hand or draws it frequently from her bosom, so that all may see her treasure. Like an engagement ring, it supplies her imagination with all the endearments she supposes the letter to contain.

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hesitation came memory of that ruse which had saved me so many words when I executed General Francia for treason.

‘There are in Spanish two hours of the day which in the Americas, sound alike: *doce media*¹ and *dos y media*.² To General Francia’s family, I said, “Come a little before *dos y media*. And then I had this General, who had forgotten honesty, loyalty, and decency, executed at 12.30, so that I might say to his family at 2.30: “But you are too late. How could you misunderstand me? He is unfortunately already dead.” Thus his family blamed themselves, not me, though they probably hated me the more.

‘Now I again used these same words to aid me, and said:

‘“Tell the Argentine Miss that I will call upon her at *doce media*.”

‘A slow smile came upon the face of the public writer, and he muttered to himself: “Cautious, always cautious: only the really great are always cautious.”

‘At *dos y media* that day, I drove to the house of the Argentina, having lied to Ismael, for at times I loathe his constant care of me. Around that block I found my regiment of Santa Ysabel drawn up in full array. When they saw me, they raised their hats on their bayonet points to cheer me, but made not a sound, for none of my dogs bark. But I cursed the world and Ismael and my detectives.

‘“May I not visit a sixteen-year-old girl without

¹ 12.30.

² 2.30.

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an escort of troops?" I called, and the men near me turned white and trembled, for I was angry.

'But my Chief of Police pointed to the windows of the Argentine Miss's apartment, blown to pieces, and to the body of the public writer, dead at my feet, and asked, "Is that a messenger from Your Excellency? If so, permit me to read a letter we found tucked in his pocket. No, do not touch it. It may be poisoned."

"But the Argentina?" I demanded.

"Is already dead, with her five companions, of cyanogen gas, as also this messenger, and a *ratero*^x I sent to knock on her door at two o'clock, that I might know how you would be received when you came. He opened the unlocked door, and died instantly, as the poison gas struck him. Therefore, we blew out these windows to clear the air. But for your dead messenger, we should now be mourning for Your Excellency."

The letter said: "We are six girls of the Southern Republic into which Rico the Despot drove our fathers, that they might be killed by the Butcher of the South. Not one of us is over eighteen, and our families are innocent of our plot. Only ridicule, we felt, could hurt that beast Rico, and we planned to seat him in a trick chair which would hold him fast while I killed him slowly. Thus history would have laughed its fill at a tyrant killed by a sixteen-year-old girl, with scissors as her only weapon. All of which he would have understood as he slowly died. Since troops surround us, he has betrayed us as he

^x Petty thief.

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betrays all, traitor that he is. We die lest he deliver us to his troops, but he also, when he opens our door expectantly, will die as we have died. Therefore we say good-bye happily."

'Six suicides, and I still alive! I thought. What a fool is any woman who dies for an idea unfulfilled, and cheerfully loses all the joys of life!'

CHAPTER XI ,

THE ADVENTURE OF THE JOURNALIST

‘WHEN mahogany lands nearly caused a war which might have destroyed me, and with me the independence of my country,’ said Rico, ‘an idea came to me suddenly, and I trusted to it, believing that it came from that void where repose the souls of dead patriots, and whence, sometimes, they direct the actions of the living who seek the good of their country.

‘The daughter of my Secretary of War had married a useless boy. By request of his father-in-law, I had sent him to report to me on certain conditions in the Great Northern Republic. While he was there on this secret errand, enemies of mine had sent to him a beautiful girl. Sex is not with my people an affair of state, and he was therefore off his guard; these enemies of mine had him compromised and jailed for immorality: an outrage, for what young man sought by beauty does not yield to its wishes? Such laws are only hypocrisy of the vilest form, and are used solely by jealous wives, by the police for blackmail, or by politicians to destroy rivals.

‘His wife was brilliant, beautiful, and devoted to him. “Had he remained here,” she said to me, “there would have been no such scandal. But months away from me! Of course, there was danger: I would not

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respect him as a man otherwise. It is your fault. Therefore, bring him back to me."

‘Soon I received word from my agent that by use of a little money here and there the matter had been arranged and only awaited my final orders. At this moment there arrived in my country a journalist, sent by capitalists of a Great Power to expose conditions under my rule, to brand me as a tyrant and murderer, and thus prepare the way for demands I could neither yield to nor resist.

‘Under my corrupt predecessor, millions of acres of mahogany land had been granted to his favorites, and sold by them, hurriedly, for a trifle, to capitalists from the North. These lands I was slowly reclaiming for my country, by taxation and other methods. But capitalists of the North alleged that I confiscated their property merely to sell it at greatly increased prices to their rivals. In this there was some truth; when I confiscated a million acres for my country, I immediately sold a hundred thousand of them to capitalists who were enemies of the former owners, thus confusing their public opinion, and forcing those new owners to defend my country’s title to the million acres, in order to secure their own title to the land I had sold them. Thus, even my enemies fought for me, and I laughed at both parties, but secretly, for against courtesy even the most corrupt are helpless.

‘But when this journalist arrived, I was warned that real danger came with him, and that every means would be used to force me out of power.

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Therefore, I sent for the daughter of the Secretary of War, though Ismael warned me:

“She is beautiful and a devil: it is foolish to receive her openly at your palace. Satan fell when Eve beckoned, and this girl is not to be trusted. She will do anything to get her husband back, and the end of her intrigue may be a long way off, and unpleasant.”

‘I did not fear the girl herself; but I ordered Ismael never to leave my room when she was present, for there is no hatred so dangerous as that of a father or a husband who believes himself betrayed.

‘To the girl, I said:

“You shall have your husband back if you will obey me. Tomorrow morning, I shall send for you very early. See that you arrive pale, languid, with eyes startled by past fear and blackened below by a sleepless night. Carry a concealed dagger, which you can easily get at, and bring with you a maid who will swear to what you say.”

“But what shall I say?” she asked, puzzled.

“My questions will guide you,” I replied. “A loving wife not only understands but holds her tongue afterwards. This is dangerous work I give you. Should you fail, I shall be forced to send your whole family to Las Islas for conspiracy. As for your maid, should she afterwards loosen her tongue, it shall be cut out. Warn her, and remember that these diplomats are not always such fools as one thinks.”

‘Then to a military aide, I said: “That journalist must be entertained by you as an intimate friend. Place pure alcohol in his wine and, when he is drunk

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escort him to such and such a street, and then leave him alone."

"To my Chief of Police, I said: "If you find that journalist alone and drunk at the corner of such and such a street, arrest him at once. He is a fool, and has fallen in love with the daughter of the War Minister. Put him in Cell Number 3. Tear open his clothes. Scratch his face, with fingernails only. I wish to scare him into decency. And at daylight, inform me by urgent messenger. Above all, no scandal, no publicity! I trust you."

"Next morning at dawn, I was waked by the messenger from the Chief of Police, who asked: "Shall I allow this foreign journalist water? He is very dirty." I became excessively angry, for when a fool meddles with affairs of state, there is always trouble. So I sent one of Doña Atlan's men, saying to him: "If the journalist has drunk water or washed, throw the Chief of Police into Cell Number 3 also, and pile all the police there upon him."

"No water had touched the journalist, neither within nor without: which was fortunate, for Cell 3¹ is small, and with overzeal, the Chief had, as I later discovered, surrounded the prison with a detail of a hundred men. Thus I was taught always to specify the number of men to be placed in a cell: for one hundred men would have fitted too closely in that cell, and

¹ Cell Number 3 was one of the twelve 'political cells,' so called. It would hold six men at most. The 'political cells' were reserved for specially important prisoners coming under Rico's personal scrutiny. A. de F. B.

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had the journalist received water, one hundred men would have gone into it, even though it might have been necessary to use a steel rammer. My orders are always obeyed to the letter.

“To the daughter of the War Minister, I sent Ismael, saying, “Come at once to make your complaint against the journalist. Bring your maid, who witnessed the assault, and, if decency permit, dress in the same costume as last night. I am the judge in this lamentable case, and would see you as you were then.”

The journalist arrived, his clothes torn, his face neatly scratched, quite evidently by female nails, and gasping for water to quench the internal fever alcohol had caused.

“Stand near the criminal,” I said to the court secretary, and to the Judge of the First Instance, who had been hurriedly summoned, “for Doña Ilena is a spoiled child, and quick-tempered.”

When she entered, she was pale, with dark circles under her eyes. Her dress was torn and looked as if she had passed a sleepless night in it. Shame lay in her eyes and in her every gesture.

“But, *Señor Presidente*,” she almost whined, “you promised me that my disgrace should be known only to you.” And, looking around as if for a corner to hide in, she saw the journalist. She shrank back, trembling with fear, and then, like a flash, drew a thin golden stiletto and flew at him. Ismael, who guessed my plan, allowed her only slightly to gash the man’s face, then pulled her back, exclaiming, “Our

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law regarding rape is severe, Doña Ilena. Let the law take its course."

"What an actress," I thought, "and without coaching! Should a *pronunciamiento* ever drive her father from his place, she could support her whole family by going on the stage." But I said to her sternly, that it might appear on the court records: "Doña Ilena, to draw a dagger in my presence is, by law, death. Guard thyself, therefore; I have no wish to condemn to death two persons. Nor is my temper of the best, for I worked until long past midnight, and now I am awakened at dawn to judge between you and this man."

Then I asked her the necessary questions, and she answered as if inspired: she was returning home with her maid as chaperon, when this man had followed her. Frightened, they had hurried. The police as usual were not within sight or hearing. At her door, by brute force, he had entered, though she had used her nails on his face as long as her strength lasted. His clothes showed how her maid had at last forced him out of the house.

"Go now," I said, "into the next office, but remain as you are. No attempts to better your dress, for I must show you to the Minister who protects this brute."

"Not to a diplomat, who will gossip my shame through the city!" she cried, and fainted deftly into her maid's arms, so that the Judge and his secretary were forced to carry her out of the room.

"Little devil!" whispered Ismael, for though he

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distrusted all women, he nevertheless admired her acting. To the journalist, I said:

“You have heard. The court will now read what has been testified. Sign it and confess that it is all true, and I will then do my best to save you from the death penalty.”

“I was drunk,” he lamented, “and knew nothing.”

“The others were not drunk,” I replied, “and to be drunk does not here excuse crime. Sign!”

And he signed, with all formalities and witnesses. Then I sent a waiting messenger for his diplomatic representative, to whom I said:

“A citizen of your country has been condemned to death according to our law against rape. Come quickly and let us confer as to how this dangerous disgrace can be averted.”

He came. He read the court proceedings. Doña Ilena and her maid again gave their testimony to him, and the journalist, now white with fear, confessed its justice.

I said to the Minister: “Write me now a statement of the justice of this sentence; also a sharply worded request that I pardon this malefactor; and I will pardon him at once. Conditions between our countries are not so good that I wish to cause more friction by executing one of your citizens.”

He hesitated a moment, but, remembering perhaps the execution squad he had passed outside my palace, did as I suggested. So we parted, with many protestations of good-will, and from him many thanks for my leniency. But to the journalist he

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gave not even a glance, though he had entertained him at the legation. Diplomats have little regard for those who hinder their plans, and the minister saw that the mahogany war must now be deferred by his country.

‘Then, having sent away all except Ismael, I said to the journalist: “It is necessary that you leave this country: otherwise, you will certainly be assassinated by Doña Iléna’s family.”

“‘I am ruined,’ he said. “‘Why not die?’”

“‘But why are you ruined?’ I replied. “‘You came here to destroy me, and you have been yourself destroyed; but all that has passed in secret. Your newspaper will dismiss you, since you can no longer carry out its plans: but you shall work for me on a newspaper in your country which is favorable to me; and at double your present salary.’”

“‘Oh!’” he exclaimed, as for the first time he understood what had been happening.

“‘Henceforth say a word, directly or indirectly, against me or my country,’ I continued, “‘and your confession shall be published throughout the world. You now have great influence, but you know your own countrymen well enough to appreciate their feelings toward a man convicted of, and confessing to, rape.’”

“‘By God,’ he said, “‘you are a man, and no hypocrite! I’ll work for you better than I would have done for those who hired me to lie for them.’”

‘And work he did, and well.

‘Thus was war averted by an inspiration of mine.

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When guile meets guile, the ablest and best man always wins, provided that he does not try to reconcile conscience and guile. And within a week, Doña Ilena's unworthy husband was safely restored to her arms.'

CHAPTER XII

THE THREE ANTHILLS

‘RIDING ahead of my troops,’ said Rico, ‘my officers and I came near the place where I was to meet the governors of my three western provinces, to which I was paying an official visit.

‘“Give me your cloak, hat, and horse, Rico,” ordered Ismael, suddenly. Heedless of his absurd request, I rode on.

‘“Have I ever advised you wrongly?”’ Ismael demanded.

‘I, astonished, stopped my horse the better to look at him, and ask “Why?”’

‘“Because of what concerns you nearly. I know, without knowing how or why I know. Permit me! There are three anthills ahead: if my guess is correct, use them!”’

‘And he was away with my horse, cloak, and hat before I could deny him. For so many years had he been my bodyservant and my wise adviser that I trusted him as no one before or since.

‘As we rode on, my Captain of Guards exclaimed, looking at Ismael, “Were you not here, I could swear that you were there!”’

‘Then, for the first time, I understood that Ismael feared treachery, and meant to save my life at the expense of his own. Even as I thought thus, there

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came a volley, and Ismael and my horse dropped dead.

‘Instantly I ordered the Captain of Guards: “Go forward and say to the three governors that, since I am dead, you and my guard will join their forces. Meanwhile, I will surround them with my cavalry. Your duty is to see that in the battle to come no one of these governors is injured. I have other uses for them.”

‘It is curious that as I rode back to my main army, I regretted not Ismael but my horse, for I was too stunned to realize that Ismael was dead. In what followed, I was for the second time in my life cruel. There is a madness which comes upon me when one I need is killed by traitors.

‘In that battle, I piled a thousand dead on Ismael’s body, calling to the mass of corpses:

‘“Go with Ismael, that he be not lonely on his long journey! Remind him to watch from above tomorrow’s festivities in his honor!”

‘Next day we stretched each governor on an anthill of his own. I stayed until sunset to watch the ants eat, for they are neat and cleanly feeders and consume slowly such delicacies as come their way.

‘On the site of Ismael’s death, I ordered a town built, and called it *Mil-uno*¹ that his memory might be perpetuated, and I granted this town certain privileges which have caused it to grow into a city. My only stipulation was that the pile of bones be forever guarded and preserved, and the Three Anthills never disturbed.

¹ A thousand and one.

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‘I was afterwards ashamed of my rage and my savage cruelty. Yet never since have I had trouble with that district. “He is a man of business” (*es de negocios*), the people said of me; and perhaps many who might have rebelled paused when they remembered what had happened to their predecessors in rebellion and preferred to go their way in peace.’

CHAPTER XIII

THE UGLIEST WOMAN IN THE THREE AMERICAS

‘THERE came to me one day,’ said Rico, ‘the daughter of Antonio Silva, saying: “Let me help you govern, as my father did.” I looked her over carefully, for the offer startled me. By suspicion I live: not that it worries me, or keeps me awake at night, or causes me to distrust my food. If in doubt, I test; and if destruction is justified, I destroy.

‘She was over twenty, and ugly beyond the possibility of slander; so ugly that her father had never mentioned her to me, and therefore, to this day, I do not know her first name. Some said that her mother had been terrified by a pet ape, and so it might well have been. She was short and fat, with sparse, dull red hair, and a chin which drooped upon her chest, eyes dull and watery blue and arms reaching to her knees. Yet she had a memory better than mine, which forgets nothing, and a mind of the first. She had been educated in Europe, and by her father, until learning might have become a vice: but she retained his clear mind with an added common-sense, and she was the perfection of tact.

“*Bien*,” I said, for I decide all things quickly.

“*Tomorrow?*” she suggested, and I gave her an apartment in my Palace.

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She became to me almost what Ismael had been. I leaned on her; I trusted her. That which threatened to worry me, I took to her, and she decided wisely. If I wished to get rid of the occupant of my Palace wing, she arranged the matter for me, and there were no tears, no discussions, and, above all, no bad feelings. If a girl attracted me, I consulted La Silva, and I was always content with her decision.

'When that second infamous attempt to poison me was made, she separated the cooks who were blameless from those who deserved what they suffered. When I lost my balance a little after this affair (for ingratitude destroys my soul, though gratitude I do not expect), she prevented me from indulging in an undesirable joke, such as in the past I had used to restore my peace of mind.

'In short, she was the ideal helper, and more and more all affairs, personal and governmental, passed through her hands to me. What I would do should she die or leave me, caused me to think. A male secretary has friends and enemies, but this girl had only me and my affairs. Had I been her mother and father and all her relations, she could not have done more.

'Thus it was for ten years: then, one night, as I lay asleep in my bedroom, my door was unlocked from without and opened. Before the intruder had entered, I was out of bed on the far side with a pistol in each hand. It was La Silva.

"‘‘God of the Crimson Bird,’’ I cried. ‘‘In another clock-tick, you would have been dead and I desolated,

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for you are irreplaceable, *señorita*, and no one knows it better than I. You know that when my door is locked not even the Lord God enters without danger. What is it? A *pronunciamiento* or a declaration of war?"

"Am I so ugly, Rico?" she asked.

"Ugly?" I repeated, dazed. "Were you ten times as ugly as you are, I would not have you take that risk you have accepted so calmly."

"Am I too ugly, Rico?" she again asked, and I, who had not yet divined her mind, replied, "Were you as ugly as Satana, the *patrona* of Hell, what has that to do with your work? I use your brains, not your looks!" In this I was as brutal as a Yankee, but as one passes thirty, it is not so easy as formerly to wake from a sound sleep, instantly prepared for an assassin.

"Let me stay here, Rico," she said.

"Never was I more surprised. "Are you afraid?" I asked. "Has anyone dared to be rude to you? Tell me who. What is the danger?"

"Let me stay here with you, Rico," she said again, and blushed until she was more ugly than ever.

"I understood at last. "Stay then, fool, if you will!" I shouted, for I was angry at thus losing my secretary. "You who are the second only to me in power in this country seek to become like that cow-woman in my Palace wing! You, who think you love me, are not content to be useful to me beyond praise, but must play the idiot in my bedroom! In a week you will be jealous, and then I shall curse you. For a month you

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will weep and be a nuisance, and then I shall turn you out. Think what I shall lose if you stay here to-night!"

"Were I as beautiful as the girl in your Palace wing, you would not turn me out."

"Stay, then," I said, "stay and be damned, for damned you will be!"

'And stay she did.

'Beside my bed, standing against the wall, was a picture of La Gloria, whose claim to be the most beautiful woman in Spanish-America no one in my country has denied, nor, in searching for her equal, have I found her. This picture was painted by a captain who, fighting against me when I was only a bandit chief, was captured by my scouts and hoped thus to redeem his life. I had meant to save him and educate him in Paris for the honor of my country, for though still a boy, he gave promise of being a great artist. But in the rush and confusion after Santa Ysabel, he had gone with the rest who wore gold lace.

'The picture, rolled, I had given to an Indian before the battle, saying, "Guard it with your life." I did not think of it again until at the first reunion of the veterans of Santa Ysabel, I noticed a soldier wearing the artist-captain's uniform and decorations. Then I inquired about the portrait, and was told that an Indian had for the last year waited within my Palace with a bundle he allowed no one to touch. I sent for him, and received La Gloria's portrait, uninjured by time, heat, bullets, or blood. I offered a reward to the Indian, but he said: "I have been fed and

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clothed for a year in my *Patron's* big hut, and I have seen his great village. Why should I receive more?" But he took enough to buy presents for his family, and went away with much to tell.

"I had La Gloria's portrait framed, and leaned it against my bedroom wall, face out. I meant later to hang it properly, but I was occupied and careless, and there it stayed.

"One night, the *Señorita* Silva set a candle before it as if to worship its beauty, as she might have worshiped a saint — which certainly La Gloria had never been. I was pleased, for I thought: "At least, the little fool is not jealous. Perhaps when her madness is over I may still retain my invaluable secretary." But later she clumsily hit the picture, and, being of oil, it was destroyed by the candle flame.

"Careless fool!" I stormed at her. "Never return to this room! It is not enough for you to be ugly, but by clumsiness you must destroy all that is left to me of my youth." Though, truly, I had not glanced at the picture for years, yet I was pleased to have an excuse for sending her away. Never before, since I was a child in arms, had anyone shared my room, and with her I could not sleep as, soundly though for few hours, I need to sleep.

"Alas, Rico," she wailed, "I could not endure so much loveliness gazing at me, who am so ugly!" And she went slowly and looking back.

"For a week, La Silva's work went on like clock-work, never better, but she grew thin, and her eyes always showed tears, past or present. Finally she said



LA GLORIA

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to me: "Rico, you do not like illness or unhappiness about you?"

"And I politely replied: "Perhaps it is that for which you hoped?"

"But she shook her head, and continued: "First you loved your mother, Rico, and then yourself, but never anyone else. How much I could do for you were I not as I am!"

"She well knew that I count illness as carelessness, and unhappiness as reproach to me who give my life toward making all my countrymen happy. Therefore, I said to her:

"You need rest: go to your estates for a time, but first train me a secretary."

"A woman?" she asked.

"God forbid!" I replied. "No woman shall ever again be more than a toy to me."

"A month from that time, she killed herself. Her suicide nearly destroyed me, for it was whispered everywhere that she died to save her honor, and her father had become a saint to the common people because of the good he had done them. Therefore, I was forced to give her that which she would most have hated: a public funeral, in memory of her father's enormous benefactions. Through my chief cities she traveled, with all the pomp and ceremony a Dictator can give, in a coffin of silver, dressed as for a bridal. In death she was a greater horror than in life, and of the thousands who walked past her, not one but shuddered and wondered that he had believed the gossip against me.

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It is my custom, when newspapers offend me, to have the land and houses of the owners taken for use of the poor and paid for in bonds which have no value. Since this custom is widely known, I am able to permit a free press in my country; which is better than posters secretly tacked everywhere, which otherwise would replace them. So that when my Chief of Police requested my people to ignore the hideous deformity of La Silva, and to think only of her intellect and the good her father had done, all the newspapers printed this request and gave it editorial notice.

'About a month later, there came a notice from a Great Power about the ever-present mahogany question. I was surprised, for this question had already been settled by the Great Treaty, which had been deftly won by La Silva from a Mixed Commission. (The Chairman, a foreigner, explained afterwards that he had given way on all points to avoid again meeting so hideous a woman; but that was merely an excuse.) On opening the drawer where the Treaty was kept, I found it empty. This loss would mean our ruin, for without the Treaty, we should certainly be subjugated by the Great Power. In my rage and despair, meanly I accused La Silva to myself of having destroyed it to complete her destruction of me.

'The next day, there came a request from the Captain of the Palace Guards that his force be doubled.

'"Why?" I asked, for it is my business to know the temper of the people, and I had by now put down the rebellion which threatened immediately after La Silva's suicide.

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““La Silva walks,” he replied.

‘I laughed, saying: “If she did not terrify you in life, why should she in death?”

‘But this rumor persisted, and, as ghosts and plots have been known to go together, I myself stood with the guard where La Silva had appeared. True enough, she came, rather uglier than in life, and though I spoke to her and told her that I pardoned her for the injury she had done me, she simply walked on, bearing in her arms a mass of manuscript as diaphanous as herself. For a moment, these papers puzzled me: then I understood, and said to the Captain of the Guard: ““Bring me at once the *archivero** and all those who have keys of our Archive Room.” For, in order that no one should be able to enter alone, I had so arranged that three men with three keys were necessary to open the three doors.

‘They came half-naked and almost carried by soldiers: when I am hurried, those around me also move fast.

‘La Silva stood at the Strong Room entrance for a moment, as if keys were being produced and the doors opened for her. Then she melted through the three thick steel doors as if they did not exist. An instant later, these doors swung open for me, and I found her examining with dismay the drawer which should have contained the Treaty. Then, with glowing eyes, which saw through steel, she glanced about her, and at a locked drawer marked “vacant” she stopped, and with delight pulled from it a shadowy

* Keeper of the archives.

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treaty. Placing it in its proper drawer, she vanished, nor was she ever seen again.

‘Of course, I at once had that drawer unlocked, and found in it the Treaty. A diplomat of the Great Power, taking advantage of the abuse heaped on me from all quarters at the time of La Silva’s suicide, had bribed my archive keeper to destroy it. Fortunately, he had merely concealed it to blackmail the Great Power later.

‘That night, I planned as a great joke to place the bribed *archivero* in convict’s costume, with a steel band about his hips, as door-opener for diplomats who called at my Palace. How my Jungle people would have rolled on the ground with mirth had they heard of this! But my sleep was troubled by the memory of La Silva’s favorite maxim:

‘“It is not humorous to annoy powerful enemies: it is merely stupid.”

‘With a shudder, I remembered her ugliness as a ghost, and, dreading lest she appear to me again to repeat her advice, I gave up my joke, and had the bribed *archivero* quietly shot.’

CHAPTER XIV

GHOSTS

WE OF tropical America believe in ghosts, and accept them as part of our unfriendly environment, but do not fear them as do Northern peoples. Therefore, in my country, to see ghosts and to believe in the occult is not to be thought ignorant or somewhat mad, as it is in the North. Perhaps our ghosts are complimented by our yielding to their powers: perhaps, even they too are influenced by our enervating climate, and, becoming less enterprising, regard us as children. At least, I know that, while they warn us and play with us, they do not harm us as in more active climates they seem to delight in doing.

Ghosts come to our tropics from all nations, as we have adventurers from all countries. In addition, we have spirits from hundreds of Indian tribes, as we draw no line in color or ancestry.

Espantos are from foreign parts, and are the sort which clank chains and slam doors. *Duendes* are hobgoblins, but with us they seldom play the tricks of poltergeists. *Espectos* are usually kindly, and give much undesired aid to old families. One at midnight tried to force me to go with it to find our family treasure, which God forbid.

Sombras are shades which weep profusely on the least encouragement. If one wakes on a hot night and

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finds the sheets wet and clinging, it is possible that a *sombra* is about. Then if one sets a parrot to cursing by placing a lighted candle near its cage, the *sombra* will depart; for *sombra*s seem to suffer when cursed. *Manes* are family ghosts, seldom seen and never useful except in guarding treasure. *Fantasmas* are such as dance in the rays of the full moon, and on dark nights crowd about us, out of friendliness, but to our dismay. They are useful only to show to favored mortals the treasure at the end of the rainbow, or with shrieks of joy to deceive the covetous who seek it.

When my Conquistador ancestor married the daughter of Quautemotzin, the vast treasure in gold which came with her was buried to avoid payment of the King of Spain's tenth, which so often was stretched to include all. Its hiding-place was forgotten when he who received the treasure died suddenly. We who owned it already had overmuch, and so saw no reason to waste time hunting for more. Others without claims felt differently, however, and died with fear on their faces. 'The *manes* of the Blancos guard well their treasure,' gossiped the peons.

In the Long Ago, a daughter of the Zamorras (the proud Zamorras, they who spell their name with the two *r*'s) was carried off at sixteen by the Indiada and raped. She escaped and returned home, but, at her father's command, no one noticed her or spoke to her. He explained to all: 'No daughter of mine would live after such treatment by an Indian: it must be her spirit you imagine about my house. But' — and he shrugged his shoulders — 'I am no believer in ghosts.'

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At the last, she lost her reason; she ran shrieking all night about the great mansion, and next morning was buried by her old nurse, who therefore was hounded out of the Zamorra domains. Her ghost was known as the Weeping Lady of Zamorra: if a daughter of the family married one who had Indian blood, she wailed about the bridegroom's house until the marriage was consummated.

My family, as I have said, has Indian Blood; on the night when one of my ancestors eloped with a Zamorra, his bride crouched in a corner of their bedroom, wild-eyed with horror and repulsing her husband. Outside, the very trees shivered at the wails of a soul in torment; the winds themselves shrieked as never before. Then my ancestor saw salvation for both only in making her his wife. As she lay, unwilling, in his arms, the screaming ceased. The Weeping Lady of Zamorra passed directly over their room, sobbing as if she had failed in her errand, and another lost soul was the only result of her vigil.

I recount these traditions only to show how common ghosts are in my country, and so to explain how it was that Rico himself many times encountered them. He said once, become for him a little garrulous:

‘There are things about us in the air, of which we know little, and which we seldom experience. The less we seek to know, the better for us. If they touch us or help us, the responsibility of breaking the veil is theirs, and we at least do not suffer.

‘There came once to my Palace a Finnish woman,

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of that race which controls the wind by whistling (so that every sailing ship carries a Finn to whistle up the wind in a calm) and sees dancing in the icy winds of their homeland spirits, good and evil, which, having left the earth, still linger in the air. She had served much at the Russian court and brought letters to me. But she had eyes only for Ismael, who stood behind me, as always.

“Give her your hand, Ismael,” I ordered, for she was of those who from lines in the hand read the past and future.

“A dreamer, a seer,” she exclaimed, glancing at his palm; but Ismael snatched his arm from her and fled, leaving me alone with her. This impressed me, for he was as suspicious as I, and felt me safe only when he was with me.

“Your right hand tells me what you are,” she said to me. “A bandit, one who loves himself only; suspicious even of the one person he has loved. Your left hand, please. My God! Pardon me, Your Highness!” And with a gesture, as if to lift a long court train, she backed from the room as never before I had seen a woman do, and at the door curtsied until I feared that her nose and the floor would meet. Such people terrify me, for there are facts I know, which this woman could not know, and to believe them written on my hand for all to read is to believe the impossible. God Himself could not write them there, nor Satan.

‘After his death, also, I saw Ismael’s long and supple fingers, which I had so hated when first I saw

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them. I was riding through the forest with saddlebags before me as always, and in the left one was my tobacco. Constantly I reached for tobacco, and each time I reached, the dead hand of Ismael held the flap so that it would not open. I did not touch it, for I was afraid. When this had happened in the shade, and in the sunlight, by morning sun and by noon sun, a thought came to me. I turned, and my guard streamed after me, as I galloped back to the *hacienda* from which I had come.

‘It is the custom, when I arrive anywhere to spend the night, for the Majordomo of the place to take my saddlebags and place all the contents on a table by my bedside. But when I returned to that *hacienda* and the Majordomo moved to open my left saddlebag, the hand of Ismael again held it closed. Of course the Majordomo saw nothing of this; but I restrained him from touching the bag. Thinking I demanded greater attention, the owner of the house himself came to unpack my saddlebag. Still Ismael’s hand held the flap. So I said:

‘“Let your son help me. Youth should work while its elders remain unburdened.” And the dead hand disappeared so quickly that I half thought that I had dreamed it all.

‘The son hesitated; and, being ordered by his father, refused.

‘“Yet you would have permitted your Majordomo or your father to open! What is it that you have placed therein?” I asked.

‘“A viper,” he almost whispered. Opening it

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carefully, my men found within that small venomous snake from whose bite there is no recovery.

“Men say there is nothing after death. Certainly this instance shows that something lingers on earth, seldom seen, seldom heard, seldom known, but at times intervening in the destinies of the living. But for Ismael’s dead hand, I would have died, and many others would have lived, for it was a wide-spread and dangerous plot, lacking only my death for its success.

“Moreover, we all know that an unjust sentence, or even a belief in injustice, enables men to haunt their judges or their enemies. For this reason, a Chinaman kills himself outside the door of an unjust judge, that he may the sooner begin his revenge.

“In my boyhood, I knew a man who had killed his wife and his friend Cristóbal, because he had found them talking on the edge of the Jungle. Always thereafter, a voice whispered to this man: “She was innocent.” Always thereafter, the murderer went about listening to this voice. It whispered, whispered, until it wore him out, for he dared not sleep lest the whisperer choose that time to explain what it was that the dead had talked of; nor could he eat for fear that the noise of his jaws should so muffle the whispering that he might lose what he demanded to hear. He died, shouting with his last breath:

““Speak louder, Don Cristóbal!””

CHAPTER XV

RICO ON JUSTICE

I. MAN-MADE CRIMINALS

SUCH interest was shown in foreign countries concerning Rico's laws and the rigidity of their enforcement that one of the great British jurists spent a month in our capital with him. None of the lawyer's comments has been preserved, since it was Rico's order that nothing said by foreigners to him should be written down, lest it embarrass them in their home countries.

Rico said to him (as he tells in his memoirs):

'Women as a class respect no laws except those which protect them. Governed by emotions and not by reason, they understand only force. Where laws are firmly and incorruptibly enforced, there are few criminal women. When I find a district with many women tried for crime, I dispose of the judges and hang criminals mercilessly, for women object to being hanged. A few photographs of women hanged without the black cap, distributed through such a neighborhood, do much, I find, to restrain women from crime.'

'Some criminals are simply born after their proper time, as was that atrocious brigand who was terrorizing my state when I assumed power. Had he been born in Europe 5000 years earlier, he might

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have been a great king, and even a civilizer. But, being a remnant of the Stone Age, born in civilized times, he was merely destructive. Criminals of this type should be killed off as we would kill off flying reptiles, if they appeared. They cannot be reformed. They are hopeless victims of their own heredity.

‘A third class of criminals is the most dangerous. It consists of women who have inherited their father’s brains and their mother’s emotionalism, in greater or less degree, and of men who are men in form only, having been brought up with girls or taught by female teachers, or having inherited their mother’s unreason. From this class come those who live on the weaknesses or vices of women. This class seems to exist largely in England and in the Great Republic of the North, and results from a general substitution of sentimentality for reason in government. From these two countries I am constantly receiving requests for laws which, if I permitted them, would destroy all respect for law and turn all my countrymen into criminals.

‘But the great majority of criminals are the product of slack law enforcement. Perhaps they break a law and escape, or are caught and turned loose with some slight punishment. Probation, it begins to be called. What then? Naturally, the criminal says: “The law specifies such and such punishment. My good lawyer, or my weeping mother, or my foolish judge (as his case may be) prevented my receiving that punishment. Next time also, I shall escape.” Next time, if a wise judge hear his case,

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he may be punished severely. Then he goes to prison with a sense of injustice, saying: "They let me off the first time: I would not have stolen or murdered the second time had I known that severe punishment would follow. To hell with all law!" He is thereafter hopelessly vicious, and not entirely by his own fault.

'Moreover, even honest men are by nature gamblers; sometimes even those who understand and respect law will evade a law which is not rigidly enforced, and gamble on not being caught if they have seen others go unpunished. Criminals of this type are man-made; the fault is with an impossible multiplicity of laws, with corrupt judges, or with lawyers.

'Such leakage of justice I stopped by hanging all lawyers employed in cases where a criminal had escaped conviction. Lawyers for the defense were executed because they had placed the life of the criminal before the good of their community: lawyers for the prosecution because of their proven inability to serve the state. There are always too many lawyers, and a few incompetents are best out of the way. The judges I ordered shot because I had placed them on the bench to convict where justice demanded conviction.

'Criminals as a class are cowardly and few, but prominent always. Fear alone controls them: terror forces honesty upon them. In my opinion, all crime would be quickly punished if honest men were not more afraid of criminals than of the law. In

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what foreign papers called the Atrocity of Temblan, I convinced the honest that it was safer to aid justice than to be careless or indifferent to the vice around them.

'The *pueblito*¹ of Temblan was a nursery for vice because our late tyrannical president was born there, and his officials were afraid to punish any inhabitant lest he prove to be a connection of the president's. Soon after I had assumed the presidency, one of my supply trains was captured in passing through Temblan, and its guards killed. By dawn the next day, my cavalry surrounded the city and by noon had shot every man and woman over sixteen. Certainly some of those killed were innocent, but it is better that two innocent people die than that one guilty person escape. Moreover, the death of weak men, or of those who hesitate on the brink of crime, is no great loss. In war, men die merely to protect the homes of others: in peace, any man should be willing to die in order to exterminate crime.

'The children of Temblan I deported to my capital and placed as servants with worthy families, saying to the children: "The first offense means death for you. Be worthy of your grandparents." And to the families they served: "For each child arrested, while in your employ, I shall fine you heavily. Care for them!"'

'The shock among the criminal classes was effective beyond my hopes. Since then, all honest men in my country have considered it a duty to aid

¹ Little town.

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justice in all ways: fear has made their honesty active and useful, instead of merely a negative quality. Heretofore they had been morally more dishonest than criminals, since they gained nothing by concealing the knowledge of crime around them which, if revealed to the proper authorities, would have made government easy and both property and life safe.

‘Seeing the success of this measure, I tried another shock. At a fixed date, arranged secretly in advance, I shot criminals, without trial or warning, throughout my country. In small places, one; in towns, ten; in cities, one hundred; in my capital, which had been poorly governed, by the score. The local *jefe* ^a selected the worst criminals, and was responsible for their being the worst. In a few cases, I had to shoot a *jefe* for omitting a relative from his list, but this was seldom. All known criminals remaining alive were warned by my civil guard that perfect conduct and honest work alone would save them from execution. The effect was again excellent. Moreover, since it is established that every criminal, on his second offense, is killed immediately, the vicious do not breed, and my people are thus a better race with each generation. It is my belief that England’s freedom from crime today is largely due to that wise period when you hanged a man for stealing a loaf of bread.

‘Laws rigidly enforced are essential to the health of a nation and of its people. But juries and elected

^a Chief.

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judges can never rigidly enforce any law. Juries were devised by lawyers to defeat the law. Actually, in England, they have no legal existence: they are an excrescence from the established right of each man to be tried by his peers. But is any criminal now tried by his peers in England?

'A clever, resourceful and wily criminal is tried before twelve men, all of whom together have less brains than the man they judge. *Tiendita* keepers, day laborers, the scum of saloons, are jurors. Is that justice? Soon perhaps women will be on the juries: I hear that spoken of as a possibility. What do such people know of the law? By what right or wisdom do they protect virtue against crime? Half your jurymen rather envy the thief they release. They say: "He has had a good time with easy money which he did not steal from us. Why convict the poor fellow?"'

'Better a judge who knows the law, who cannot be bamboozled by clever lawyers, who has no pity for crime: to whom a weeping wife or a tearful mother are merely a part of the day's work and have no relation to the trial. Such a judge may occasionally be bribed. Sometimes he may be prejudiced: but he has always superiors who watch him. He has ambitions depending upon his good conduct. He is much more certain to decide cases for the good of the community than any twelve men who will consent to act as jurors.

'But an elected judge cannot strictly enforce even the most essential law. He may be honest before

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election and anxious to remain honest during his term of office, but he is elected by politicians who are always without conscience. He takes office for a short term. Since he makes his living by being a judge, as I live by being Dictator, he must thereafter, be re-elected. Those who really elect judges are politicians, criminals and the rich. Therefore, to be re-elected, he must favor politicians, criminals, and the rich. It must always be so, unless all judges on retiring from office could be pensioned for life, which is impossible.

‘No, a judge, to enforce law, must be appointed by that higher power (in my country myself), which controls his future.

‘Now, anarchy is better than unenforced law, since anarchy cures itself, but a law not enforced brings into contempt all the laws upon which the State rests. Therefore, from the first, I have done away with multiplicity of laws, for few people will keep or understand a multitude of legal restrictions. These few laws I have enforced with the greatest severity against rich and poor, great and simple. No mother’s tears have ever caused me to pardon, nor wealth nor influence prevented an execution.

‘Undoubtedly, my success in ruling this country results from the fact that I made no laws for which the nation was not yet ready. When first I took power, I did away with all law except that against rebellion. Soon all people except criminals were worn out with robbery: then I forbade thieving, and the whole country rose to aid me in shooting thieves.

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Now a porter walking alone carries his load of one hundred and fifty pounds of gold from mine to mint, and if a highwayman stops him, the robber and all those connected with him are buried within a week. If not, those who administer justice in that district are shot and new judges and police pursue the criminal. In ten years, only one such robbery has occurred. If a purse is lost in the street, the first passerby stops the second as witness, and neither touches the purse until authorities are called. (I fine the loser for carelessness which might lead to criminality.) For twenty years, government property has been absolutely safe. If a cavalry horse drops a shoe, the person who finds it hangs it up in the nearest *jefe*'s office. Now your property is safe, wherever it may be, except from the police. And when the police steal, I can punish them more easily than I can professional thieves.

'The time for a law against rape came next. A girl may now walk the length of my country, through city or jungle, and no man molests her unless she flirts, in which case she has thrown aside my protection. She may protest that she flirted innocently: but God's blood, was ever woman innocent who flirted?

'Next comes murder. Slowly I am convincing my people that murder, even "private justice" as it is called, is undesirable. In another ten years, life will be as safe as property.

'You have therefore in my country the most law-abiding land in the world. Respect my few laws

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and no man will trouble you. Break a law, and you will yourself be broken, with absolute certainty and promptitude. To teach this respect has, it is true, cost some thousands of lives, but without such respect, the lives lost would have been counted by the hundred thousand.'

2. THE DRUNKEN BOY

'There came to me yesterday,' said Rico, 'one of those women who have good sense about most things except their children.'

'"Can you prevent people from selling liquor to my son?" she asked.

'"Yes," I replied.

'"Thank you," she said, rising to go.

'"And those who will give him liquor?" I asked. She sank back into her chair in despair.

'"Let us discuss this matter. Your son has always had too much money and too little work?" She flushed, and nodded her head.

'"He has drunk to excess, both before you tried to control him and now?" Again she nodded.

'"Let us see whether it is possible forcibly to stop his drinking. I can forbid anyone to sell liquor to him, and I shall be obeyed, though probably not until I have shot a hundred rum dealers."

'"That would not be much loss," she exclaimed hopefully.

'"No, but a hundred families would have lost their living because of your son's vice. Beyond this, to stop those who give him liquor, I should have to

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shoot a dozen sons of the best families, before my order was observed." I mentioned several names, but, being a mother, she was quite ready to sacrifice other mothers' sons to the possibility of saving her own.

"There remains my police force. It is impossible for the police to be honest: that I know, of course, because too many people of position and wealth are ready to bribe them. But as a rule, my police are fairly decent. When I discover that they have been bribed, I fine them double the bribe and let them work it out as street cleaners. If they seem to be too prosperous, I place a special tax on policemen.

"But consider the effect of my order regarding your son. First, the police would continually be bribed to overlook the selling of liquor to him. Again, they would undoubtedly blackmail all liquor dealers by threatening to accuse them of selling to him. In short, to cure one drunkard, the whole police force of our country would be hopelessly and permanently demoralized. Beyond this, finding my inability to stop their corruption, my police would apply the same system to all vice, and our criminal laws would become simply a source of trouble for the whole country. Any criminal could bribe any detective; and of necessity, decent people would have to bribe the police to obtain protection. But the criminal can bribe more heavily than any except the very rich. Therefore, in curing your son, I would undoubtedly expose all of our countrymen to criminal attacks as well as police oppression.

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“For a law which is not obeyed because the people consider it unnecessary or unjust destroys the moral sense of the whole state not only regarding that law, but as regards all laws. Not only is it impossible, for me, Dictator though I am called, to stop your son from drinking, but the mere attempt to take away his liquor would soon cause organized vice to control our country.

“I myself have attacked liquor. I do not drink. No, not more than a glass of wine at an army dinner. The Army must drink, partly because a good soldier is of the reckless drinking type, and partly because I force all habitual drunkards into the army, and send them to the wilder places where disease and battle soon kill them off. For, madame, there is no cure for the drunkard except death.”

“Rightly do they call you ‘Ruthless Rico,’ ” said the mother bitterly, and for a moment I thought that she would spit at me, as did La Gloria in dying.

“Madame,” I continued, “your son was pressed into the army last night, when found drunk and breaking into the house of a respectable girl. In deference to you, he was not shot. Be grateful to me!”

“But she went out ungrateful. Fanatics are without gratitude or wisdom, and all mothers are fanatics regarding their children.

“Man is but a scum, breeding upon the face of the earth, and breeding too quickly. If in doubt, kill! Nor fear that you waste aught of value. Human life is the cheapest of all nature’s products. All else

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must be wrung from nature by toil, by ingenuity, by self-denial, but mothers gladly bring forth unlimited human beings and count as their chief joy in life their sufferings and care before and after. God has made them so. But why?

'In order that from a mass of men the best may be preserved and the worst destroyed as quickly as possible. Ants — the wisest of living creatures — control before birth the utility of that which is to be born, producing a soldier, a worker, a queen, as may be their need. We humans, less wise than they, produce our breed with no previously known aptitudes. Therefore, we have later to rid ourselves of criminals, the insane and idlers.

'But all the instincts of mothers oppose this killing off of the lower intelligences in order that higher beings may not be hampered in their progress. If man does not control women in this regard, what we call civilization must give way to an anarchy produced by masses of useless humanity preying upon the wise, the useful, and, most of all, upon the workers.

'Today, this mother has drawn up a poster, and had it nailed to walls throughout the city. So true in many ways, and so humanitarian in its views, it is nevertheless a danger signal.'

Turning to his secretary, Rico asked: 'What is the Señal family worth, in land, city houses and banks?'

'About a half-million.'

'*Bien*, a thousand posters have been secretly printed and tacked up. Fine the head of the family

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five hundred dollars a poster. He is a good and honest man; but he cannot control his wife and must therefore suffer for her. Send him to my old village and allow him enough money to live well there. But keep his wife and children here. She will work at the washtub to support them, and have no time to think; for when women think about politics, they not only waste their time but endanger the State. Her remaining children, being of good blood, and brought up in poverty, will become useful citizens.

3. PRISONS MORE CRUEL THAN DEATH

‘An English spinster, ugly, badly dressed, and contemptuous of me as a Racial Inferior,’ said Rico, ‘recently brought me a letter from an English Duke whom I had known when he hunted through my country. He is an intelligent man, and later apologized for giving her this letter, saying with a laugh that it might widen my horizon to meet one of her breed. Already I had met several, but I did not say so.

‘After convicting me of brutality and disregard of all those decencies upon which civilization depends, she demanded: “At least reform your prisons!”

‘“But madame,” I replied, astonished at her ignorance, “we have no prisons. Drunkards go to my jungle army, where they live a year or two and are meanwhile useful. Murder, banditry, and robbery I punish at once with death. Those who commit such crimes are in revolt against all government, and their lives are not worth the cost of feeding and watching them. Why should you and I be

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taxed to maintain the useless lives of those who break laws essential to our existence?

“Moreover, to imprison criminals is to be as cruel as they to their victims. In fact, the greatest cruelty of which man is guilty is the prison: far worse than a swift death.

“Reform them? Well, reformation is sometimes possible, though always improbable. At best, reformed criminals are less valuable to the nation than honest men who have never gone astray. Besides, even though they are reformed, they breed criminal children, who, unhappily for themselves, must prey upon the community. I once had a stallion, a beautiful creature, but vicious. All his colts were also vicious. I neither imprisoned them nor allowed them to breed, but wisely shot them all.

“As for minor criminals, they have a light steel band welded above their hips, and do public work at half the local wages, living as they wish while serving their term. Afterwards, they live in certain places only, where the hardest or most dangerous work is being done. If found elsewhere, or convicted a second time, they are shot at once. Once welded on, their band remains for life — though I have had some difficulty in finding an alloy which such minor criminals cannot file off their hips.”

“The spinster’s mouth had opened wider and wider until I feared for her false teeth. When I had finished, she stormed at me:

“President Rico, I shall report you to the whole world!”

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“ ‘Especially, madam,’ I suggested, ‘to China, the only country in the world which has existed just as it is since 5000 B.C. Sentimental nations which substitute feelings for law have meanwhile sprung up and vanished by the dozen. Permit me to aid the sale of your book by expelling you from my country.’ ’

CHAPTER XVI

RICO'S RULE

THE easy acceptance by the Indiada of Rico's rule resulted from his understanding of them, derived from his Indian mother. As far as was possible or expedient, he followed the custom of the country. When this proved inexpedient, he found ways of enforcing his will which yet did not arouse the people against him.

I. HE STOPS DONKEY-BEATING

'From time to time,' said Rico, 'a foreign Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals notifies me that my people beat their donkeys, and asks me for a No-Cruelty law. Now I know that such a law would arouse resentment among my people, and therefore go unenforced: and this I will not permit.

'But since we are a small nation, I must be careful to conciliate foreign public opinion in minor matters; otherwise, speculators eager to sell war materials at war prices, and with their profits to buy mahogany lands from the starving vanquished, would force foreign statesmen to declare war against us, ostensibly to prevent donkey-beating, or for some other cause of equal importance. Every anti-cruelty society in the world would applaud such a war, for their members are little likely to be called upon

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to fight. Besides, fanatics of all types will at any time gladly cause a war in order to carry out their fad, regardless of its result on national life.

‘Therefore, I order my secretary to answer that I have long attempted to curb this vile crime, but that, since my country is a republic, representatives elected by donkey-beaters prevent me from passing such a law as the Society desires. Then I notify a few loud talkers to introduce and discuss at length in my Chamber of Deputies a law against donkey-beaters, and also instruct my Congress to cast a greater number of votes for this law than they did last year.

‘When the vote for No-Cruelty, by such increases, comes near to a majority, I have elected a new set of deputies strongly in favor of donkey-beating, and we begin this farce over again. I receive many membership cards to No-Cruelty societies, and hang them in the Hall of Diplomats in my Palace, where, on reception days, diplomats make wry faces at them, but, understanding the power of guff and pretense, say nothing.

‘Meanwhile, my own method of treating this evil of donkey-beating is different. When complaint is made, that a man unduly beats his donkey, I send Ismael, who beats the man. Both are brought before me. The man says:

‘“This donkey is mine: why should I not beat my own?”

‘“No reason at all,” I answer, “but you belong to the State: why should I not have you beaten?”

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'The donkey-owner scratches his head and laughs. The hearers laugh too; for all understand that point of view.

'My judges follow my example: soon it is understood that for some incomprehensible reason I am opposed to donkey-beating, and so, if donkeys must be beaten, they are beaten privately, as also all wise men beat their wives. (Donkeys, however, differ from wives in my native district, in that donkeys take their beatings quietly, while wives howl loudly in order that neighbors may know that their husbands love them sufficiently to thrash them. How often have I heard women complain to their gossips: "My man no longer loves me: he has not corrected me for a month. I must sharpen my butcher knife and find out what woman has taken him from me.")

'The donkeys have not yet sent me a vote of thanks to hang in my Hall of Diplomats, but I am thinking of having some Chamber of Commerce publicly thank me for my efforts in behalf of donkeys, so that I may send copies of their parchment to Cruelty Societies throughout the world. Or, better still, my secretaries shall write to those societies and ask that they appoint a day and hour when all lovers of animals may join in prayer for my success in the giant effort I am making in behalf of Kindness to Donkeys. Praying is not hard work, and gives to all the pleasurable feeling of being near to a great power, and also of being superior to those prayed for.'

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2. 'UNTIL WE MEET IN HELL, RICO'

An early French psychologist came to my country to test his theories upon a childlike people. He found us childlike in many ways, but in others, to his vast surprise, so sophisticated by the thousand centuries of our civilization that he returned to Europe too puzzled even to write a book about us. In a letter which he wrote to an eminent poet, which was recently published in his autobiography, I found this story:

“I had sentenced an Indian to death,” said Rico to me, “for a crime not contrary to his tribal customs but abhorrent to civilization. He could not understand why he was being punished, and demanded that I discuss his sentence with him. This is the right of every criminal, to explain to his judge why he considers his punishment unjust. It is a right seldom used, for we are a race which for thousands of years has yielded to absolute power. Nevertheless, it is just and should be maintained.

“The Indian stood before me, a stolid block of flesh, silent, fearless, with all the stubborn power which has enabled us to remain ourselves despite a dozen conquerors, and which will leave us a nation still when all this present hybrid Spanish civilization is buried in its own ruins.

“Why do you kill me, Rico?” he asked harshly. No appeal, no fear, no regret did he show. I smiled at him as at a rebellious child, and answered:

“You are killed for the good of our common tribe, Pedro, as I also shall be killed, doubtless, when my time comes.”

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'His whole demeanor changed at once. His sullenness passed away, and he turned without reluctance to go to death, saying merely, as his eyes met mine:

“Until we meet in Hell, then, Rico!” And he sought for the handle of his dagger, in pledge to wait till then, when we should fight it out, man to man, and the Crimson Bird should decide between us.

I, to humor him, grasped the handle of my knife, also, exclaiming:

“Until we meet in Hell, Pedro!”

Thus, by knowing my people, I sent a man contentedly to death who might otherwise have been an inconvenience to me.’

3. THE STATUE

During the years of oppressive government by the old Spanish families in my country, ‘gold lace’ had become a term of reproach, since it was associated in the minds of the people with a multitude of cruel and corrupt officials, who had dressed in rich uniforms.

Ismael’s order after the Battle of the Banners: ‘Kill all who wear gold lace!’ had practically eliminated the old nobility. Rico then commanded all his officials, no matter how powerful, to wear the regulation undress private’s uniforms, which he himself wore. Then he imported from the Isthmus a Tijuantepec Indian, a tall man, stolid and grave, who had never been known to smile, and who, speaking only his own language, was confused and

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dismayed at his new life. Rico created him Admiral of my country — which possesses no navy — and dressed him in a uniform so gorgeous in colour, so covered with gold lace, orders and diamonds, that the poor man's house must be guarded night and day against thieves, and that he could not even walk the streets without a company of soldiers to protect him. "He is looking for his navy," said the local wits, when they saw him: but they did not speak loudly, for Rico's officers received respect in public.

Treated with the utmost gravity and politeness by the President, he was always at Palace ceremonials. Seeing him, cabinet ministers and generals were careful to express no discontent with their own plain uniforms, for all understood that the first official to request gold lace or decorations would be at once created vice-admiral. And only the boys who crowded respectfully around the Admiral when he walked the streets coveted this position.

Some years later, Rico was in one of those fits of reckless gaiety which he usually had when some great danger, either for our country or for himself, was past. This time, the cause for gaiety lay in the death of an assassin whom Rico himself had killed with that short thin sword which he always wore unsheathed and which his father had taught him to use with lightning quickness. The body of the assassin, together with those of the door officers who had allowed him to enter the Palace, had been

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thrown to the crowd which roared sullenly outside Government House, having heard of the attempt on the life of my country's most beloved citizen.

These fits of gaiety frequently ended in some joke, which, though not always in the best of taste, produced laughter throughout the country, and endeared Rico still further to the population which, being grave and with few amusements, was the more grateful for laughter.

At the right moment, there appeared a delegation from the retail shopkeepers of one of our largest cities, asking that Rico permit them to set up a statue of him in their plaza. Now of shopkeepers, Rico was always contemptuous. It was known that he had said to his intimates:

'Shopkeepers are essential to show to people the meaning of cowardice: for they not only fear for their lives and goods, but cringe before each customer, lest he buy elsewhere. Let a customer pass their shop, and they run outside to notice where he buys. If one bargains, threatening to go elsewhere, the shopkeeper writes me an anonymous letter, saying that my customs house is corrupt, and has allowed his successful rival to import without duty. Sometimes this is the truth, but seldom: for all customs officers proven guilty of taking bribes are shot at once.'

Therefore, when Rico received this delegation with over-politeness, and, hearing their request, granted it at once, there was a stir among his officers, for he hated statues as he did gold lace.

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'But,' added Rico to the storekeepers, 'I myself will provide the statue. It shall cost \$50,000, to be levied pro rata on the stores of your city, with the exception of the *pulperías*, which are too small to be taxed. I must have the money in a month. To save you expense, your statue shall pass the customs house duty free.'

The storekeepers went away dazed, for they knew that this was an order. The Collector of Customs, who was also tax collector of the city, himself assessed all stores and remitted the money to Rico. Now, not all shopkeepers had approved the statue; and the *pulperia* keepers, being untaxed, refused to join in a general raise in prices of store goods to pay for this work of art. Therefore, there was ill-feeling against the delegation.

As soon as the shopkeepers had been escorted from the Palace, Rico sent for his personal secretary and with roars of laughter dictated to her various cablegrams and letters. It soon became known that the Admiral and his staff would proceed abroad, not only to purchase the statue, but to 'buy material,' and that European powers would be expected to receive the Admiral with the usual salutes and official respects due his rank. With him, Rico sent one of his cleverest Treasury officials, saying:

'Let it be known everywhere that we are entering the world's markets for the goods our increasing civilization demands, and that I intend to buy with government gold goods of all descriptions used by my country, thus by monopoly purchase ensuring

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lower prices. If this does not force respect for my Admiral, I shall have to conquer Europe.'

And he laughed again, so that even Doña Atlan's men knew that he joked. However, they believed that he could conquer the world if he wished, and rather resented his fondness for peace, saying:

'Did not our mistress train this young man, and has he no desire to prove her training useful? The Battle of the Banners was good, and the assault at Santa Ysabel worth watching, but, after all —'

The President himself saw the Admiral and his staff off, and at the last said aloud to his Treasury official, so that all might hear:

'He who sees my statue before it is unveiled shall not see it thereafter. Use care and secrecy, therefore, both in Europe, on shipboard, and here.'

And the official, smiling, opened his uniform above his heart, and exclaimed: 'I understand the penalty.'

Great curiosity was thus aroused.

When the Admiral and his staff returned with the statue, and it was set in place, ready for unveiling, such a throng gathered as my country had never seen. Rico and his generals rose at salute. A presidential volley was fired, and, at Rico's signal, the drapery fell.

The vast crowd waited, with open eyes and mouths. They were silent a moment, dazed by surprise; then a laugh passed from the statue outward, until it seemed that the whole country laughed. For the statue was of a short and very fat man, dressed as

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was our Admiral, with every color of his uniform repeated on the bronze. Rico, over six feet, thin almost to emaciation, and only a mass of muscle and bone, laughed with the rest. Then he raised his arm, and all fell silent. He shouted:

‘Tell my friends throughout the country that should any other city desire my statue, it has but to levy the required tax on its shopkeepers.’

Such was the popularity of this statue that when Rico's successor ordered it destroyed, the city rose in rebellion, and therefore it still stands, as a rebuke to those uniforms and gewgaws which now rule, where formerly a man governed.

4. RELIGION

‘A religion,’ said Rico, ‘must suit the climate and the people. The bleak and colorless Protestant religion of good deeds and much preaching, which believes that each man must alone find his way to Heaven, is unsuited to my tropical people. The Catholic religion, on the other hand, with its gorgeous ceremonial, its saints, its fast days, and its leadership, suits my people, who demand leaders for all purposes and are loyal unto death to them. Our blood stagnates; but let jealousy, rage or indignation rouse us, and it rushes from heart to brain as it never does in other climates. We brood over injustice until we must ourselves be doers of justice. We can see nothing wrong in killing a man who has struck us or a woman who has deceived us; but we feel that God perhaps does not approve such acts.

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Therefore a church which by a vow to some saint or a set series of prayers at some shrine assures us of God's pardon for a murder we are about to commit, is admirably suited to our emotions. Man's justice for such a murder we do not fear, and die stolidly or even happily, since our self-respect is satisfied. It is only God's pardon we ask before and after.

'Protestantism demands that we repent for sin; this we never do, nor wish to do. We are self-controlled, and if we did not regard the sin as justified, why should we sin? And if the sin be justified, why should we repent? I have heard jungle dwellers say, discussing this point with curiosity and amusement, after some wandering Protestant missionary had left them:

' "I killed Fulano del Tal because he sought my woman. Why should I not? I am glad that I killed him. If he came to life again, I would kill him again. Why, therefore, repent? That Yankee is mad."

'Our God is a tribal god, who belongs to us and cares for us to the exclusion of other tribes, just as I must favor my people against foreigners. When, in order to ward off war with a nation stronger than we, I stopped the killing of foreigners, I merely said:

' "I will not have them killed."

' "*Que curiosa*," my people whispered among themselves, "Rico must be stealing from these sons of goats, or he would not protect them." Then, shrugging their shoulders:

' "It is better thus. If he fills his pockets from them,

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he will not steal from us." Thus they accounted for a reduction of taxes I had made.

"We treat our God as we treat a judge. If we are about to commit a crime, we choose a locality where the judge is related to our family or our tribe, and we send him such gifts as suit our means or our crime — a few eggs, a horse, or what we have. But God is an unknown quantity. He exists because His Church and His priests exist. Since He Himself is inaccessible, we bribe those who represent Him: our priest, if we are poor; the Bishop, if we are rich; the saints, if doubt of the power of priests or bishops has entered our minds.

"The first hint I get of an attempted revolution comes always from gifts to the Virgin at our most famous shrine. The names of those who give unusual votive offerings are seldom unrelated to leaders of the proposed *pronunciamento*. I knew this before I seized the presidency, for I had myself occasionally sent the Virgin a stolen string of pearls just before a battle; but I sent them always by a servant of some officer of my enemy, thus attracting to him the thunderbolt which might otherwise fall on me.

"Furthermore, exactly as we resent a judge who decides against one of a family related to him, we discard a God who fails us. He must have been heavily bribed by the other side, we think.

" "*Que diablo Juez!*" we say. "I am a cousin of his third wife's uncle, and yet that man he never saw before won my suit. How much do you suppose that the judge would lend me, of what he was paid by

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that thief?" Therefore, when our anger and astonishment have cooled, we go to the judge to borrow a part of what he received from our opponent. If he loans us a dollar or two, we are so proud to have forced our opponent to bribe us into submission that we forget our lost suit. But we select thereafter a more trustworthy judge to decide our disputes.

'What chance has the Protestant religion with such a people? From Protestants come hospitals and medicines. These are good. But Protestants are seldom well-bred in our sense, while Catholics teach our young children the good breeding which is the foundation of Indian life. Protestant schools are such centers of lack of discipline that I would suppress them if I dared. The best that I can do is to have their converts shot as fast as they become unruly or criminals.'

CHAPTER XVII

FINANCE FOREIGNERS AND DEMOCRACY

IT IS said that no native of my country ever ventured to ask Rico a question — except perhaps La Silva and Ismael. Rico himself was in private called '*El Pregunión*'^x because he asked innumerable questions. If an unfortunate, rattled by too many queries put backward and forward and at intervals repeated, gave differing answers, he was thrust aside as unworthy of confidence, for Rico's memory was unfailing, and he demanded both correct answers and good memory. But foreigners did not hesitate to question him, and with them he spoke freely and frankly on all subjects.

Rico once said to a foreign diplomat (from whose autobiography I have extracted this):

'Yesterday, a Great Power sent me a request which was really an attempt to force me to repeal my laws which prevent the collection of any debt under ten thousand dollars. A memorandum with this order explained that the Power desired to increase its exports to my country, and could only do so if our laws permitted collection of bad debts for careless sellers.'

'I desire only the happiness of my people, and cannot see that debt could do otherwise for them

^x The Questioner.

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than debts have done for the poor of all nations: decrease their joy in life and cause dishonesty to become a national characteristic. Material comforts are double-edged. The poor are improvident and will buy always as many things as they can get on credit. At present, a storekeeper in my country cannot use courts to collect debts due to him, nor can he recover goods once removed from his store by a buyer.

Therefore merchants trust a man's character. Character becomes by necessity a man's chief asset, and he guards his reputation for honesty as he guards his wife or daughter, for in death or illness most men must be credited for means to carry on. Thus honesty has been placed at that premium which is usually placed on dishonesty. Formerly, the dishonest bought on credit such goods as they could obtain, and, without paying, moved elsewhere and did the same thing again.

'When I assumed the presidency, my statisticians, from an investigation of merchants' books, calculated that thirty per cent of all goods bought were never paid for. (Incidentally, this is less than the losses of storekeepers in some foreign countries.) Then, of course, since merchants must live, this thirty per cent is added to the charges paid by honest people. The buyers who paid their debts were thus fined thirty cents on every dollar more than they owed, because the dishonest had not paid for what they bought. Actually, five years after debt collection by the State ceased in my country, store prices had decreased nearly thirty per cent.

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'Moreover, taxes, which all persons hate, are not solely the money collected forcibly by the State for its maintenance, but are also all that outgo which honesty must pay to support and punish dishonesty. All money paid personally or indirectly to lawyers, or to support courts or prisons, is a tax which honest people must pay for the benefit of the dishonest.

'By shooting criminals instead of imprisoning them, I have saved the honest people of my country enormous sums. By my destruction of the *pueblito* of Temblan, I forced honest men to consider as their personal affair the catching of criminals. Crime almost ceased, because every honest man aided the state in fighting it. Thus I eliminated the costs of catching, convicting, and punishing criminals.

'Add to these amounts that money previously spent for lawyers and court charges on bad debt collections by the State, and you will see how I have reduced tax collection by seventy per cent during my presidency. Since the cost of maintenance of the State was so decreased, I was able to remove all taxation except on stores, on imports, and on city land. Therefore I have done away with a vast army of tax assessors, collectors, and the like, and saved their salaries as well as stopped infinite corruption in assessments. In all other nations, rich and influential men are always assessed lightly, while the poor are assessed and taxed to the limit of their endurance.

'Beyond this, investigation by my experts reveals

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that the great dishonesty in cities the world over is largely due to the fact that the rich and influential, having received light assessments as the price of their silence, dare not protest practically against corruption. They are allowed to join reform committees and even to give newspapers interviews regarding the necessity for reform, but if they attempt any real reform, the mere threat to tax their property on a fair basis shuts them up abruptly. Notice that all reform movements stop suddenly. But since I shoot at once any assessor who is proven to have favored the rich, in my country the rich are taxed as heavily as the poor.

'In relieving all our farm land and improvements from taxation, I have stopped that flocking of the poor to cities which had become a dangerous problem. Without taxes to pay, farmers find life easy, and profits are such that they prefer farm life to that in the city. Also it results that farm goods are cheaper in my cities than before, thus saving at both ends.

'I made another considerable reduction in indirect taxation by a prohibitive tax on all forms of advertising. The object of advertising is to induce people to buy what they otherwise would not need. What a family needs and can afford to buy they will always buy without being urged. Advertising adds considerably to the cost of all goods. By my refusing to permit any form of competitive publicity, the cost of store goods was decreased to all my people without any loss to them.

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‘Newspapers protested that they could not exist without advertising money. I ignored their protest, for newspapers are of doubtful value, and are usually owned by rich men for purposes of propaganda. As a matter of fact, newspapers still exist in my country, but they have become of readable size — say, two to four pages — and having ceased to be very profitable, have often fallen into the hands of the men who work on them, instead of being owned by capitalists who hire reporters and force editors to doctor the news for purposes foreign to the public good.

‘To prevent the common people from buying what they do not need and to reduce taxation are among the chief purposes of government. As a result of my care, my nation is now as honest as human nature permits, instead of being as dishonest as the law allows.

‘Therefore, I have today destroyed those political levers upon which the Great Power depended to force my country to collect bad debts for careless sellers.’

In talking to an English nobleman whose fearless exploration of our jungle he admired, Rico said:

‘We call the Spanish “*gachupin*”¹ because during our colonial period they hogged everything in sight, and gave nothing to the creole class. Hence our revolution against Spain. Nevertheless, we rather like Spaniards as a class. They are courteous, dignified, and easy to get on with.

¹ Pig.

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“The Germans we call “*perito*”¹ because they are trained to perfection in what they are to undertake before they come to my country. They speak not only Spanish but usually also an Indian dialect of the district to which they go. They are familiar with the currency and needs of the people around them, as well as with the church and local customs. Thus they give no offense through ignorance, and as a rule marry money or position and settle as permanent residents. Many of our best families have German blood, though often they carry the mother’s name.

“If you hear small boys barking as a German passes, remember that it is because “*perito*” and “*perrito*”² sound sufficiently alike to appeal to a boy’s sense of humor. My police have orders to catch all children who bark after Germans and force them to crawl on all fours for a city block, at risk to the seats of their breeches if they stop. But I fancy the threat of this merely adds to the boys’ fun.

“Yankees we call “*los brutos*” because they are without discipline, courtesy, or real knowledge of what they undertake. Moreover, they insult every other inhabitant of the Americas by calling themselves ‘Americans’ as if all we others were animals. Were it not for fear of their army, I would allow none of them in my country. Their only idea is to snatch at what they wish without regard to our laws, local customs, or honesty. They are always in haste, always wishing to be first in all things. I

¹ Expert.

² Small dog.

have shot more judges corrupted by Yankee gold than by the gold of all other nations combined.

‘Occasionally, there is one who is honest, kindly, and polite. To him I give papers as English, because in the killing of Yankees for crime, for disregard of the law, and a dozen other misdemeanors, I am helpless. They are so hated by the Indiada that it is impossible for me to protect them. Fortunately for me, their government is careless of the lives and property of its subjects, and as I insist on tact being used when Yankees are killed, it is rarely that I have much trouble.

‘Only the Texans are held in respect in my country. There are still parts of Spanish-America where children are scared into silence by the threat: “The Texans will get you,” and I have many times heard peon soldiers say sadly, “We would have easily whipped these sons of goats, Yankees, were it not for Texas.” My Atlan bodyguard, gossiping among themselves, once said, “The conquest of Europe would be easy for Rico if he desired it. But the Texans,”—and they shook their heads—“the Texans might be a tough mouthful even for our Old Woman.”

‘“I have only killed one *Tejano*,” said one of the Atlan men, “and he fought with a long knife in each hand and kicked me in the belly with both feet. My chum, who cut his throat from behind, said that the Texan used only one foot to put me to sleep for a week. If so, these Rangers must have quicksilver for blood in their veins. I would have opened his leg to find out, but I was in my blanket

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for a month, and She of Atlan had warned us to bury quickly and deeply every Texan we killed on our trip, since, she said, they are all first cousins and fuss overmuch when one is killed. *Sangre de Cristo*, what a kick that Tejano gave me! My mule, which usually enjoys looking on at a fight, lay down and died from envy or perhaps from rage at being outkicked by a Yankee."

'The English are well-liked, being trained to respect law. Even their criminals and escaped seamen have the fear of law before their minds. Your Government looks after its subjects properly and well. Few deserve killing; few are killed.

'At times, when an Englishman has been justly killed, so that I cannot decently punish those who disposed of him, and yet your Foreign Office presses me, I am forced to shoot three or four minor criminals, selected by the local *jefes* and innocent in this particular case, but not much loss to the State. The British idea of justice is then satisfied. If there is a fine for the benefit of relatives of the dead Englishman, I assess it against the community in which the murder was committed. Thus they are warned to be more careful in concealing their crime next time.

'The French as a rule are peaceful vineyardists. The claret you praised as equal to the best imported French was raised by a Frenchman on a thin shallow mountain soil.

'The Irish we get are chiefly runaway sailors, and have a fascination for the women of our poorer classes. Many of the local criminals I shoot each

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year are halfbreed Irish. Examine historical records, and you will find that half the revolutions in Spanish-America have been started by the Irish or their descendants. Frequently the name has been so corrupted as to be difficult to recognize, but it is Irish all the same. O'jeda, Obregon (O'Brien), Geraldo, Garay, Fiol, are all well-known names with us. The most cruel dictator Spanish-America ever saw was of Irish descent.

'A bandit against whom I myself took up arms had that ever bad mixture — German and Irish with a dash of Indian blood. He was a man of thoroughness, imagination, capacity and endurance. The Woman of Atlan lost six of her best bravos before he was killed. Had he had any capacity for government, I would have made him governor of one of my states, but he was merely destructive and vicious.'

* * *

'There are four classes of humans,' said Rico to the German minister; 'men and women, with two intermediate classes: women with men's brains, who yet are unreliable because they have also the nerves and purely personal outlook of women; and the most useless class of all, men who should have been women, since they have the feminine characteristics of a facile tongue, love of sitting about in a group of other women, a fondness for art, music, and any form of philanthropy, with a softness of thought which demoralizes government.'

'Since women and semi-men outnumber real men, a republic in which everyone is allowed to vote is

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impossible. In fact, there has never been a real republic with more than a few thousand voters. For example, in early Rome, education was limited, and women were regarded as housewives and child-breeders only. This is true also in Andorra at the present day. All other republics are so called to flatter the poorer classes by persuading them that their votes count. Actually, in all of them an oligarchy or a plutocracy rules, where a dictator is not in control.

'In Spanish-America, we call ourselves republics in deference to the Great Republic of the North, which forbids monarchies in the Americas — a delightful farce to please that organized hypocrisy known as public opinion. No emperor ever had more absolute power than I, who seized the presidency after killing the late tyrant. A great man can come to power only by fighting his way up. If he is a benevolent despot, as I am, the country is happy; if a mere tyrant, it suffers. Yet, even under a tyrant, the masses suffer less than under a plutocratic régime which works them to death and taxes for the benefit of Special Privilege, until their hardest work returns them only a living so poor that my jungle dwellers, who spend half their time dancing and singing, would rebel were it forced upon them.

'Unreasoning devotion to work, sadness and crime are the invariable results of a plutocratic republic. Leisure is unknown in a land where such a government has existed for a century. Its people become incapable of enjoying idleness, which is the gift of

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the gods, taken back by them if unused. Leisure is the mother of reflection and individual growth. Every boy and every unspoiled man is a natural loafer, who reverts easily and completely to all the leisure he can get. Work was God's curse upon man, and is beneficial only to women, who are incapable of useful thought, and to criminals.

'But fashion now decrees that women must not do all the work, as in the halcyon days of the Golden Age, and therefore men must work to live. No boy was ever a good worker who did not learn hard physical work before he was twelve. Moreover, the early use of force, on which government rests, will teach a boy to be a good citizen.'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LORE OF SIBELE

I. THE SEVEN CITIES OF CIBOLA

Rico played his childhood away among ruined cities, many of them older even than tradition. Therefore, archæology interested him, and he entertained lavishly the archæologists who visited our country. To some of them, he once said:

‘All legends and traditions have some valuable foundations in fact. Yet scientists discredit folk lore, instead of seeking its origins. Take, for example, the Seven Cities of Cibola: no legend is more thoroughly discredited than that. When, after years of effort, the Spaniards finally reached the site of their supposed Golden Cities, they found only a few mud-houses on top of a cliff. No legend since the Flood has ever been more widely believed; yet scientists have concluded that the Seven Cities were merely the imagination of nations which never greatly valued gold, and to which cities were by no means a novelty; ethnologists think that different tribes extending two thousand miles north and south, and a thousand miles east and west, concurred in dreaming of these cities.

‘The truth is that the Spaniards were told of the Seven Kings of Sibele, whose houses were roofed with gold. Sibele was not sonorous enough for

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them, so they changed it to the mouth-filling Cibola. Then, not being able to imagine a king without a city, they assumed the cities. Since the Spaniards were a dangerous nuisance to those tribes they encountered on their exploring trips, each tribe located the Golden Cities a few days' march further on, toward the deserts in which all hoped these white men would perish.

'Now a tradition, persisting among my Indians, explains this legend: they believe that when their ancestors, migrating from the sinking continent, traveled south, seven great nobles remained behind attempting to save the people of our western province. Because they remained willingly, their names are graven on the portals of our oldest and most hidden city. It was long supposed that the great earthquake which parted our continent had destroyed them; but later we found that they had taken such sailing ships as offered, and with their people sailed through a steaming ocean, tossed by earthquake waves, away from the fierce volcanic glare which from time to time ashes and steam rendered barely visible.

'Many days from our lost continent, they found a low-lying coast and landed. Nearby was a little hill, topped by a great stone pillar. Shaken by the earthquake, this great stone inclined to them; their leader said:

‘“The only inhabitant bows to us in welcome. Let us remain here.”

‘This new land lay between the three mouths of a sluggish river which, in flood time, refreshed its soil

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with new layers of silt. There were no trees except palms, with which they built and thatched their houses. Corn and other seeds they had brought with them. Fish in endless variety and quantity gave them meat. Though other races existed on the mainland, they feared this earthquake-haunted river, and had never crossed its delta.

‘Here, therefore, the Sibeleños refounded our old, peaceful, happy civilization. In a thousand years, they became again a great people, living in simplicity and content, with few wants, and neither poverty nor riches. The seven nobles became the Seven Kings of Sibele, each ruling for a year the five villages which the Sibeleños had formed. As each New Year came in, the Seven, fasting and newly bathed, sat in a circle about the great stone pillar which had first welcomed them. Toward one of them it bowed, for the country was shaken by many *temblors*,¹ and that one became the year’s king.

‘Where the three mouths of the river which protected them came together into one stream, was a very high fall of hard stone. Here a fisherman found gold left by the stream as the water fell into a great stone bowl, thence placidly but reluctantly to move on to the sea. Since palm thatch must be renewed before each rainy season, the people beat out thin sheets of this gold and covered their roofs with it. They had no other use for gold, for each grew what he needed, and if any had too much, he shared with those who, from illness or age, had too little.

¹ Minor earthquakes.

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‘Indians, standing on the high *brincon*¹ over which the river fell, looked down and saw the delta, like a city with a hut to each acre and each roof covered with gold, which glistened in the hot sun. Thus ever farther and wider spread the story which lured the Spaniards, of cities built of gold. Even as far as to my people of the Scarlet Bird the story came. We had used gold for roofing houses on our sunken continent of Sibele; so that when we heard this story, we realized that another remnant had probably been saved from our ancient race. Therefore we sent a ship north for days and weeks to seek them.

‘We found them living our old life, as if still at Sibele, and worshiping our old gods. But we, surrounded by hostile tribes, had changed our ways. We were armed, and they, examining with curiosity our weapons, were amused at these, the necessity for which they could not understand. Even our language had changed, so that we understood one another rather as cousins than as brothers. Our new gods permitted cruelty. What we had was not shared equally among all. Therefore we were ashamed, and the Sibeleños’ leaders were ill at ease lest their people, like all common people, easily misled, come to prefer our ways to their own. So we made a pact, saying:

‘“This is yours. That is ours. Let each go his way in peace.” And thus it was.

‘Later, perhaps a thousand years or more (for

¹ *Brincon*—from *brincar*, to jump. A precipice over which water jumps. A. de F. B.

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time is of no importance in legends), there arrived a few of the Sibeños to ask for aid. They told us that the old gods, discontented at non-observance of their rites, had sent an earthquake at the New Year, which rocked over-much the stone pillar around which the Kings were seated. Falling, it rolled to and fro and crushed them all.

‘There was left only a girl to succeed. She, the descendant of Kings, despised common men, and, crossing the river, bore a son by one of the Silent Ones. This son, a monster in form and nature, forced war between the five villages, and introduced cannibalism, saying that meat was needed to produce real men. The people, meeting in secret, implored aid from the gods; and there came therefore a great earthquake, during which the whole delta sank into the sea.

‘A few were saved, God knows how; and these it was who implored our aid against savages who pressed upon them from all sides. But we ourselves had much to contend with, which with difficulty we survived, and could give them no aid.

‘That is the history of the Seven Cities of Cibola. Let those who seek them look below the great ocean. Where the river flowed is now a mountain, so they told us, which rose from the land as their villages sank below the waves. Today, there remains only the wretched remnants of the Sibeños, who each year have a week of weeping and praying for the restoration of their lost land.’

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2. POISONS

Conversing with a foreign medical commission sent to our country to look for new medicinal plants, Rico said:

'We have many marvelous cures, but you will find it impossible to do more than watch their effect. Our medicines are all derived from herbs, gathered in secret at certain stages of the moon, and with religious ceremonial certainly two thousand years old, as our calendar and books prove; their preparations take weeks and months, accompanied always by rites of which even I know nothing.'

'These cures are the work of aged women, descendants of the priestly classes, who have devoted their lives to them. To bribe these women, or to watch them secretly, is impossible. Annoy them with questions and you will perish as did the Empress Carlotta, of Mexico, who, questioning an Indian woman too closely, received from her that frightful poison *Talava*¹ (that is not our Indian name for it) which destroys mind and soul, but leaves the body uninjured. In fact, this poison even improves physical health, so that life continues to extreme old age.'

'There is no known cure for a mind which has once absorbed this poison. But tradition states that a common garden bloom, properly prepared, will cure the diseased mentality, if the body be strong enough to stand those convulsions which accompany excretion of the poison. I have known several

¹ From *Talar*, to destroy. Among Indians called 'The Vacant Mind.' A. de F. B.

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people thus poisoned: all had one trait in common — a great love for flowers. This seems to be the only trace of mentality that they show, as if they were feebly conscious that a cure awaits them in their gardens. German medical men assure me that the Empress Carlotta showed all these symptoms.

‘We have a cure for rabies which has never been known to fail. We have several love philters, accounted effective for both sexes, and varying in speed of action and permanency of effect. I once saw a girl repulse a suitor with horror and contempt, and, a week later, having drunk such a philter, marry him and give him a lifelong devotion which he little deserved. We have time poisons, by which a man may be killed instantly or die at any time the poisoner may choose, up to one month from date of administration. It is possible to destroy nerves and blood vessels, so that, amputating an arm or a leg, a priest cuts as if through punk.

‘Brush roughly against one of the old herb women, and she will smile and thank you, but watch the hand that touched her. If you are careless, a thorn will scratch it — on a trail, in your saddlebag, or on your writing table — and your hand will begin to wither where you struck her, and with horrible slowness the withering will continue up your arm, but stop at your shoulder, affecting only the nerves of that hand and arm. She will have taught you the lesson in politeness you deserved.

‘A priest touches one who has committed sacrilege — merely a scratch with his finger-nail over the

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heart — and the skin reddens. Gradually it is eaten away as if by a corrosive. The wound does not spread, but deepens slowly until it pierces the heart. Perhaps a rapid cancer is formed from his touch; it is significant that no member of the priestly class ever dies of cancer.

‘My people on the Lost Continent studied plants and the human body for many thousand years, and sacrificed human lives as you do dogs to determine the effects of their medicines. We believed that a thousand human lives were profitably sacrificed, if the nation could be cured of one disease. At first, we used criminals for these experiments, but, as we became increasingly civilized, criminals ceased to exist; for we regard criminality as the most dangerous disease from which a nation could suffer. Therefore, we stopped crime by executions and by breeding only from those not addicted to vice.

‘When we lacked criminals for medical experiments, then an enlightened public sentiment induced the old, the sick, the useless, to offer themselves freely for experimentation. They were rewarded by monuments and by titles for their descendants. Women who were barren and therefore useless to our State were, because of their high-strung nerves, most valuable in the work of deducing cures for nervous disorders and for maladies curable by the mind alone.

‘Alas, we had no malaria on our narrow ocean-girt continent, or its cure would have come with us to our new home.

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‘I think that no improvements in our medicines have been made for three thousand years. Life was so difficult in our new home that we merely retained the knowledge that we brought with us. Later, as our civilization decayed, we lost much of what we knew.

‘Only a trifling part remains; and yet even that trifle includes much curious knowledge which would be valuable to the world. But modern women will not devote their lives to our medicines, which are out of fashion. With the deaths of our aged devotees, their knowledge will, probably, pass from the world.

‘No, gentlemen, I can assure you that you risk greatly in your search and will accomplish nothing. We are an old race. We have never shared our knowledge, and it will perish with my generation.’

CHAPTER XIX

ART, VEGETARIANISM, RELIGION, AND SUPERSTITION

‘THE chief value of art is as an index of the growth or decadence of a nation,’ gossiped Rico to La Silva. ‘From the Cro-Magnons, whose size, brain, and art exceeded those of moderns, and who at their peak in art vanished utterly, through all nations, history shows the same. A crude art while the nation is growing in strength and power; a finished product when the people reach the peak of their usefulness; and an extravagant or formal art when decadence has progressed toward national downfall.

‘Egypt, China, and England all show the same cycle. England, when it was growing and reaching over the whole world for colonies, had an art so childish that it was laughed at by all peoples more advanced toward decay, a period of chromos and of photographic artists who with great skill but little genius copied nature in oils and told a story in their paintings. Then it was that the rich English collected foreign painters or accumulated Old Masters for their names or for some fancied skill in technique, much dwelt upon by the hangers-on who made a living from selling them.

‘So long as this went on, British statesmen laughed secretly and did not fear for their nation. It was

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only when native British art began to exist that a note of pessimism crept into their national councils. No man dared to say why; for art was fashionable, and women, always powerful until they reach power, followed fashion in this as in all other things. To have decried art would have cost any British statesman his place; not directly, of course, but as a result of that chorus of whispers which maintains a man in power or destroys him.

‘You smile at what I say, *señorita*; you, who were brought up in Paris and trained in the arts, whereas I never had a day in school. But, by this very lack, I acquire a never-satisfied thirst for facts. Also, as you know, experts in art from all countries talk openly and freely to me; partly because they are away from home, and partly because I am an ill-famed despot, who could easily be disavowed were I to quote them to their own people. Few except those who are artists or have pictures for sale — and women and feminine men — think otherwise than as I do. Even the Woman of Atlan held this view: she always warned me against that love of beauty which she herself had, insisting that art is a parasite destructive to the people and the nation which cultivates it. And the English mistress said to me:

‘“You have the best potters in the world. Keep away from foreign art.”’

‘The religious leader I most greatly admired was a vegetarian from India. He lived the life of the soul, and his mysticism surprised even me, who was

taught all that is left to us of the knowledge of Sibele. "Give up meat," he said. "Devote months to your soul and your mind, and there shall be few limits for you."

'I obeyed, and, living upon nuts and grains, drinking only evaporated water lest I be contaminated by animal food, I became cowlike in my contentment. All men were good; all their motives for the best. Never have I been more happy. I needed only a cud to chew, and I would have been as a cow in a green pasture with a calf beside her. My people were my calf. I saw them fat, healthy, happy, content with me as with themselves.

"Then came Ismael, carrying a thick steak, still sizzling, done to a turn and covered with that thick gravy which I love.

"'Wake, fool!' he called to me. 'Cease thy dreaming. Eat of meat which has trembled at the call of the jaguar, which has fought for a hind, which has felt the ecstasy of passion, which has saved its life by thought, by cunning, by bravery; which is replete with all the qualities a ruler needs. Eat, fool, or you and I die tonight. For a man I would die willingly, but for a grass-eater ——'

'I ate, at first with revulsion, then greedily and full of three months' unsatisfied hunger. I saw the world again as it is, not as it should be. By noon, General Francia and his dissolute crew of rebellious schemers lay dead beside a mud wall. I found that tyranny had crept into my government; corruption filled its fists; gold braid had even begun to appear

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in public, and I had neither seen nor heard. My officials, who for three months had thought me as good as dead, woke to life and to fear.

'In Sibele, that ancient home of our race, now sunken beneath the great ocean, we were all vegetarians. We thus produced the best religion the world has ever known: it forbade any man to eat while another of our race hungered, nor could any man be clothed or warm while another was cold or naked. And we lived our lives absolutely by these rules.

'We delved more deeply into the mind than any other race. To transfer thought over our continent, both by sight and hearing, was our commonplace. Traces of these powers of my race exist in all parts of the world, carried there by wanderers. The Indian mystic, the American Indian (even in Alaska), the African savage—all retain a trifle of our powers, surrounding this trifle with religious rites, incantations, or mysticism, as may be.

'But science, other than medicine, was unknown to us. No man collected nature's facts sufficiently to know the dangers which awaited us from our many volcanoes, nor to foretell when earthquakes and tidal waves would destroy all except two remnants of our race. A little less altruism, a little less attention to mental powers and a little more knowledge of nature might have enabled us to move, as a race, to a more stable continent.

'But could we anywhere, except in our ocean-protected land, have maintained our unselfish civil-

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ization? Surrounded by wolves, can hares do aught but develop their legs? Is not the completely selfish instinct for self-preservation more powerful than any civilization founded upon loving one's brother as oneself?

“The law of nature is that meat-eaters devour grass-eaters; wolves rule hares, and cats, mice; and must always rule them until hares and mice become meat-eaters. Therefore, I believe that the common people only should be vegetarians. They have no hope, nor any future. They would thus become bovine, contented, yielding easily to authority and happy in so yielding. But their rulers must be meat-eaters or the poor will become the prey of those human wolves who seek power and luxury at their expense. Show me a race which is vegetarian, and I shall find it often conquered and now ruled by aliens, or at best by rulers not of its own food habits.

“But,” you say, “the great conquerors were meat-eaters, and yet they are called the Curse of God; therefore — ?” The truth is that these conquerors were God-given, and fed with meat by Him. They destroyed nations already rotten with decay. They consolidated tribes into nations; destroyed languages unneeded by the world and a bar to intercourse among men. They left their world apparently ruined, with corpses piled mountain high and rivers red with blood; but after each conquest, the world was better able to move on. Upon each conquest, a higher civilization was raised, slowly emerging from that barbarism which founded it.

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‘To grow, to blossom, and in decay to await the new Conqueror who shall destroy its evils while bringing forth new leaders and a newer and better civilization—that is the history of all nations. Even Heaven itself was perhaps founded on Satan’s rebellion.’

‘A religion,’ Rico said, ‘must promise and must threaten. If there is Eternal Fire for all unbelievers, so much the better. All successful religions teach it until they begin to decay from too great prosperity and the necessity for drawing the rich into their fold.

‘At first, strong men, wearied to death by injustice and the pressure of life, seek the promise of better things. Then comes a great religious Teacher, whose vision of this life and the life beyond is clear, and he formulates religious rules in a better way. Each new Teacher is better than his predecessor, which is the only proof a wise man possesses that religion is progressing. Each new Teacher in his turn, and contrary to his teaching, is deified, and his new version of God surrounded by priests and theology until it decays and ceases to attract all men, except those who profit by it, and those fanatics to whom Hell-fire for others replaces all other amusements.

‘The great religious teachers are the greatest men this world has ever produced, because throughout their lives and even for a few years after their deaths, they give hope to the people who before knew only fear. Even in priest-ridden decay, the teachings of a great man can still uplift a few souls into a happiness

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beyond that which we others can feel. Ministers, priests, fanatics, and theology combined have never been able to destroy man's desire for religion, nor, when a great teacher comes, can even these harpies destroy his message.

'My religion of the Scarlet Bird dies because it is merely a hope — neither a promise nor a threat. When our blood-stained bird flies forth over the great ocean, seeking the lost Sibele, we have a few days of ecstatic hope, which is religion; but it is too little.

'Great religious leaders have come to me from all parts of the world, imploring me to use my absolute power, and the faith my people have in me, toward founding a religious republic. It is a dream, but a pleasant one for me, who love power and would thus become God's cousin, as have all rulers who use religion to assure the maintenance of their dynasty. To attack God-descended rulers is sacrilege, and sacrilege guards more securely than even the men of Atlan.'

'Many half-educated men, and most scientists, believe that there is no difference between tradition and superstition, and when the thoughts of the brainless are muddled by useless efforts to educate them, this is literally true. But traditions are oral history, and often I suspect superstition to be the same, further removed.

'A little Irish-Indian half-breed girl, when I pass her father's hut, always calls "Saint Margaret and her nobs" after me for luck, since I sometimes bring her a chunk of milk boiled solid with mescal, the one candy

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all children love. “*Sancta Margaretta ora pro nobis*,” my priest tells me her gibberish means.

‘When, a bandit, I chose haunted places for the security they give, another Irish half-breed taught me “numdy-dummy” as a certain cure for too inquisitive ghosts. Often I have repeated it to reassure my followers, and since they never after were troubled by spirits in that place, they came to regard it as an exorcism *de primero*.¹ The same priest tells me that this wondrous exorcism is derived from the Latin “*In nomine Domini*,” which is after all more of a real charm than I had expected. But both are mere superstitions, relics of that time when a few words of Latin sufficed to calm kings on their death-beds, or stop conquerors before a rich shrine.’

¹ *De primero* — of the best, most-to-be-desired.

CHAPTER XX

RICO ON WOMEN

‘WOMEN are like shopkeepers: their best is always first displayed. Therefore, one’s estimate of them is usually more flattering than the truth. But since they rush after those who have money, celebrity, or power, and I, while still in my twenties, had all three, I have had excellent opportunity to judge them. I have talked not only with women of my own country, but also with wives of diplomats and travelers, not to mention those extraordinary spinsters, chiefly English, who go to all parts of the world, and are a nuisance everywhere.

‘Nature made the mass of women mere transmitters of brains, incapable of serious thought. In my life, I have known only three women to whom it was possible for me to talk, as to men: the Woman of Atlan, La Silva, and the English mistress. The first two lacked that pride which forbids meanness, which men of equal ability would have had; both were unscrupulous beyond man’s custom; both had greater ability along certain lines than any man I have known. The third I never tested.

‘Now notice the meanness of the Woman of Atlan. My General Valaramo, a fool for talk, but a wise man in guerilla warfare, boasted when drunk that he could conquer Atlan within a year, and that only

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my fears prevented him from so doing. I heard instantly of this, for all important news comes to me quickly, and much that is unimportant as well. Instantly, therefore, I ordered Valaramo to the far south, to subdue a tribe of brigands which collects toll on a river there. This I did, knowing that he had not a month to live. But he was killed as he passed from my Palace, and by one of those men who are not only soldiers of the Woman of Atlan, but also my personal bodyguard. As the Atlaneño struck, he exclaimed: "By order of the Woman of Atlan!" — and was, an instant later, himself killed.

'Yet no one believed him, and ever since I have had to bear the burden of blame for Valaramo's murder. Who but a woman would so shame a man with whom she was on good terms?

'La Silva had the brain of a man, as well as insight into men: she had also that deeper morality which enables rulers to govern wisely and well without regard to morality. (For a lie, a theft, or a murder may at any time be essential, if what is best for the nation is to be accomplished quietly and wisely.) Yet, from an insane passion for me, who admired her brain as my greatest aid in government, but loathed her person, she committed suicide under circumstances which ruined my reputation abroad, and nearly destroyed my power at home. Had I lost the power, I would, of course, have lost also my life, which she had spent ten years in protecting.

'Why these contradictions in women of great talent: contradictions impossible in a man? Because

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woman is ruled by emotion, and not by reason. With the Woman of Atlan and La Silva, an unreasoning gust of emotion for the moment nullified their long-continued efforts to help me. That even the greatest of women can allow themselves thus to be swayed, is evidence that one can never wholly trust any woman.

'In general, woman is primarily a mother, and will protect at all costs to herself and others those she loves. Morality, fear, chastity, the common good, law and custom are disregarded when affection over-balances them. How many women sell themselves in marriage or on the streets, to maintain children, or to supply luxuries to a worthless lover! I once nearly lost my eyes to a female humming-bird, so tiny that I could not see it in its swift attack on me, when I innocently came too near its eggs. It loved the embryos so much that it did not hesitate to attack a six-foot monster, armed with pistol, rifle and *machete*, a touch of whose fingers would have crushed it.

'Substitution of the love of an employer for maternal love is quite usual with childless unmarried women. In my army, each general carries with him a female secretary. More often than not, she is his mistress. But, not infrequently, she is a middle-aged woman, too old for passion, who has dedicated her whole life to her employer, and is his to do with as he wishes. She will lie, forge, murder, and die for the man who overworks and underpays her. She gives him that maternal devotion which is not twice in a lifetime given equally by any woman. She throws pearls before swine: a great benefit for the man, and a

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great loss to the woman. When, as often as not from mere wantonness, she is turned away, she is disillusioned and incapable of good work in any other place: for it was about the man, and not about the work, that she was enthusiastic. Such cases I have seen too often; I would forbid women in the army as in all other departmental work, but there are limits to my power. My life is too valuable to my country to risk it at the hands of women deprived of the only outlet for their maternal love — the care of some General or Department Head.

‘But here again is a weakness of woman. The Chinese ideograph for trouble is “two women in one house.” Thus the Chinese recognize that no man can have two really good female secretaries at the same time.

‘Women have no sense of humor, not even La Silva. But they are great diplomatists. Watch them manage their children and deceive their husbands, and you will perceive the basis of all true diplomacy and learn how stupid, by comparison, are the men of the Diplomatic Corps.

‘Much of the trouble in the world is caused by ignorant meddling women who have not enough to do. In my brigand days, a valuable sergeant came to me, complaining:

‘“My wife quarrels with me so much that really I have no heart for other fighting. Some day I shall run away from a battle, and then you will shoot me. Help me, *Patron!*”

‘His wife was a large energetic woman, slim and

rather pretty, but she had no children to occupy her, and therefore was perpetually intruding in affairs which did not concern her and were not improved by her energy. So I advised him:

‘“Give your wife a beating and tell her that you must look elsewhere for children if she does not provide them. Then smile at every pretty woman you meet when you are with her, and shut your eyes for a time to what she is doing. She will provide a child as soon as she sees that you mean business. A peaceful home is worth some sacrifice.”

‘It worked perfectly. The sergeant soon had children enough — though with no resemblance to him — and his wife, provided with outlets for her energy, became a model for all.

‘It was another woman like the sergeant’s wife who wrote me the other day a personal letter. How an Anglo-Saxon republic which has given birth to great men can endure such women, who would like to remake the world in one day, not even taking those six days God needed to form it, is beyond my imagination! Were she of my country, I would give her to General Comacho with orders to harness her tongue and surround her with a dozen children, that she might learn wisdom.

‘She implored me by virtue of my absolute power to set a noble example to the world by decreeing what she calls ‘the single standard’ of morality throughout my country. She is ignorant that thus she would destroy that principle of evolution by which man rose from the apes. Where would the human race be now,

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had not the strongest and ablest men taken all the most beautiful women they could find, and thus produced a multitude of children inheriting at least a part of the useful qualities of the father and the beauty of the mother?

‘God created man to seek out the best women and as many of them as he could find. He also decreed that the moment one male met another male more capable than he of improving the race through his harem, the abler male should succeed him.

‘Great kings were indispensable to the civilization of Europe, but women now forget that the King’s innumerable bastards, by spreading the ability which enabled their fathers to rule an unruly people, may have done more for the nation than even the King’s ability could do.

‘In early France, the nobles were undoubtedly the ablest men of their country. Much of the ability of the French today is due to the right of the first-bed, by which any peasant girl on her marriage remained with the Lord of the Manor for one night, thus ensuring that at least her first-born child should have a chance to inherit ability from its father. When the Revolution destroyed this right, by reducing the number of brilliant boys born each year it did much to take away the world power France had had.

‘This custom is now a horrifying thought to women: yet, at that time, because fashion decreed it, and all women yield to fashion, whether of clothes, the heart, or the bed, women highly approved it. I had one of my diplomats go over old court records in

France. He reported the following cases as showing the point of view which then prevailed:

‘A bride committed suicide on the day of her wedding because the young Marquis of B—— refused her his bed on her wedding-night. Her husband assaulted the Marquis, and in defense put forward the plea that the noble had put an unpardonable affront upon his wife. Her father testified that his daughter was young, pretty, healthy, and good-natured, so that no reason existed for the nobleman’s neglect. The Marquis was thought to have been regrettably neglectful.

‘A marriage was to have taken place, and the bridegroom at the church door refused the bride because their overlord had notified the bride’s father that she would not be needed by him. The Manorial Court decided that the groom was within his rights, though it was careful to say the Lord of the Manor was also within his rights, since the custom was a courtesy to the bride, but not her right.

‘An Intendant of an estate was sued by a father for return of money paid him to insure that the bride-to-be was not neglected by his Lord on her wedding-night. That she had been so neglected was considered a slur upon her, equivalent to an accusation of ugliness, ill health, or bad morality.

‘The fashion of monogamy and the preaching of the Church, which urges chastity and takes from illegitimate children their rights and opportunities, are slowing evolution and threatening to make man sink again to the level of animals. Were we wise, we should make it the fashion for women to attach themselves

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openly to great scientists, great statesmen and great soldiers. Women should boast of such men, as their children's fathers, and of how useful their children would be to the state. The children of these clever men should receive from the state the best maintenance, the finest education, and every chance to make use of their ability. In what way does man differ from the animals, that he dares to breed from inferior males?

'This fashion would be the easier to create because it is woman's instinctive desire to be useful to celebrities. Women naturally seek after and adore distinguished men. They do not understand why-for they are incapable of thought. It is curious that they are attracted in the same way to great criminals. An example of this presented itself to me early in my career. When I first took possession of my capital city, after the Battle of Santa Ysabel, I found the district terrorized by a bandit. A man without learning, knowledge, or capacity to rule men, he was no more than a brute, who ravished and then killed any girl he met, or if a child near him cried, dashed out its brains. After I had captured him, in order that none might later terrify my people by pretending to be he, I caged him for a week before his execution in my Palace square where all might see him.

'Never was I more astonished than when I found that women flocked to talk to him. They fought to be the first to provide food, tobacco, and drink for that brute! Among them were not merely prostitutes and women of the poorest classes, but many ladies of wealth and culture, including, my secret police in-

formed me, the wife of one of the ablest members of my cabinet. Over a hundred sought permission to "solace" his last hours, and, had sentimentality governed me, there would have been many a little bandit born of him, and later to be shot by me when caught in crime. It was simply the eternal desire of women to be useful to a celebrity, coming from that age-long era when only the strongest man could protect his harem and his children.

'If women are permitted to vote, they will vote as they dress, in accordance with the fashion of the day, provided that personal interest does not enter in. They can learn neither force nor compromise, which are the basis of government. Therefore that country which has freed women begins at once to sink. It may be maintained for a century or two by women's instinctive demand to be protected and controlled, but its end is as certain as fate. We see this even in Heaven, where the Bible mentions only male angels. The female angels went to Hell with Satan, who freed them to use them in attempting to oust God.

'The English system of separating boys from their mothers at a very early age and sending them to great public schools where they practically govern themselves has produced the greatest administrators the world has ever known. The mother is useful to the boy up to six years old. Beyond that, no woman should control or influence any boy who might be useful to humanity. For men grown from boys taught by them will have a tendency to crime, since they will never have been controlled by force.

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‘Female teachers are employed merely because no man will serve at their pay, or because they pleasure some influential school controller or politician. They know nothing except a trifle learned from books, and are ignorant of courtesy. They can make a man into a boy, but never a boy into a man.’

Rico’s views on female teachers were perhaps colored by the visit of a party of foreign teachers, on a vacation tour, who came to examine him as they would go to a Zoo to see an elephant. Rico received them standing on the highest of the Palace steps while they passed in front of him. One of them, undisciplined like the rest, reached forward as if to touch him, saying coquettishly:

‘I want to see if you are real.’

‘So real,’ Rico replied, ‘that, had you touched me, you would have lost an arm.’ And he pointed to the drawn *machete* of Ismael.

Though they drew back with ‘ohs,’ they merely giggled disbelief in a threat which seemed an amusing unreality. One of them remarked so loudly that he could hear her: ‘Good-looking for a nigger, isn’t he, Gwendoline?’ staring meanwhile contemptuously at this great ruler — a man who had forced peace, prosperity, and safety upon a nation of millions which had never before known relief from bandits and civil war; a man brought up in poverty, who had never seen the inside of a school, yet who now spoke a half dozen languages and a dozen dialects, and had for years talked intimately and equally with more

great scientists, statesmen, and philanthropists than these women had heard of.

Rico's distrust of women was so increased by the death of La Silva, which was the result of her entrance into his apartments, that he made it a rule that no woman should be allowed in his Palace (except, of course, in the wing allotted to his mistresses, which had its own entrance and was connected with his apartments by a corridor and two locked doors, to which he kept the keys). This rule was but once broken. The intruder was a diplomat's wife, who entered against Rico's will. She left so broken in spirit that thereafter her husband ruled her, and not she her husband. He was a man of breeding, and said nothing, but for ten years thereafter a case of the finest cigars reached Rico on each anniversary of her taming.

The only woman for whom Rico was never heard to express contempt was the mistress of a great English noble who visited my country. Many believe that she is with Rico now, wherever he may be. Rico himself once said:

‘With her, I spent so much time in conversation that Ismael warned me:

‘“You will have the English to fight. Let that woman alone!”

‘And I, dazed by his sudden attack, could only reply:

‘“But we merely talk, and you are present.” For, detesting women as the source of all trouble, Ismael stood always behind me if I spoke with one.

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“At your age, not to know that if a woman talks to you she has a purpose! Chatter, yes, that is different, and may mean nothing; but when a woman discusses life with you, she knows what she wants long before you do. That English Lord who keeps her has his doubts and is well able to throw a battle-fleet at us. Go carefully, Rico, or they will be calling you ‘*Pobre!*’”¹

‘She had a brilliant intellect, and like me, by her bringing-up was shown life as it is. The illegitimate daughter of a noble so powerful that he could educate her at the best schools, she was called suddenly from school by her dying mother, and told:

‘You have no money. You are finely educated, beautiful, and accustomed to luxury. Make your choice between being a shop-assistant for life and accepting the young Marquis I will introduce to you.’

‘She accepted the Marquis: they fell in love, and were happy until his family insisted on his marriage.

‘Marriage is due your position in life,’ she told him. ‘Be a man for the sake of your title, which is worth a sacrifice. Leave me; never see me again. Have children, that I may continue to be proud of you.’

‘And she refused to take money from him, saying:

‘To you I gave; I did not sell. You have been my romance.’

‘Twenty years later, he lay dying, and she went as a nurse to care for him, urged by his threat that he would tell his wife all if she did not come. Standing

¹ Poor.

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at the foot of the bed, she watched his wife and children kneel around his bedside as he died, and with raised hand, unseen by them, rebuked him because his eyes turned at the last moment to her.

‘As he lay ill, he had been in feverish anxiety regarding her future, and so she accepted £20,000 from him; but when he was dead, she returned it to his executor, saying:

‘“One must humor a man about to die, but I cannot think of myself as having been sold to him. With other men, I have played the game, selling myself, but giving good value. But even kept women have their pride, and this is mine.”

‘She wept as she told me this story, and Ismael, behind my chair, loosened his *machete* in its scabbard, for he saw only guile in her tears. To save me from this woman, he would have ruined my reputation and plunged his country into a disastrous war, but as I did not even touch her hand, he merely clanked the long knife against its metal bolt to warn me.

‘From her, I learned much of life and foreign politics, for she bent statesmen to her views as if they were of soft rubber, yielding to her touch. But when I prayed her to remain with me and help me rule, she only laughed, saying:

‘“Come abroad and learn to live. Since you were twenty years of age, you have governed your nation well. When you are forty, you will have earned the right to live where you please and as you like. After forty, too, quickness of insight begins to fail, and this country is like the Great Forest where, when an

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old stag loses strength, the younger ones kill him. Your Governor of the North only waits for this. Come abroad and I will show you many things."

'But I did not promise her.'

Nevertheless, it was at the age of forty that Rico disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI

RICO DISAPPEARS

I. THE SINISTER NORTHERN GOVERNOR

Rico's disappearance is one of those historical mysteries which intrigue casual readers, and still more, anyone who examines all known sources of information but retires from his search with several possible solutions, yet no certainty.

Since first he assumed the dictatorship, Rico had occasionally made trips on foot through his capital or other cities and even into the Jungle, seeking always to know the physical condition of his people and their mental state toward him and his policies. While Ismael lived, he led the party, which was made of Doña Atlan's men, who could be trusted to die for their *Patrón*. No notice was ever given of such trips, and nothing was ever known about them. Yet any group of wanderers, walking or running, might contain Rico himself, always keenly observant and, as some unfortunates discovered, never forgetting what he saw nor forgiving those law officers who hoped to hide corruption or brutality.

When he returned, unannounced and missed only by a few high Palace servants, officials would be summoned from here or there, where he had wandered. If fortunate, they were set to work on his street cleaning gang; if less fortunate, they were shot and buried

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with no notice except that the *Periodico Oficial* published their titles and names. Promotions and changes also resulted from such trips.

On a visit to the far south, he once met a governor of a state, riding on a gold-plated saddle and wearing the forbidden gold lace. Him he later called to the capital and promoted to be Vice-Admiral of our non-existent navy, as he had promised to do to any who wore gold lace. The cost of the uniform, so laced with gold and studded with gems as to out-shine those of all foreign diplomats, ruined the former governor, and since his new office entailed no salary and no work beyond perpetually wearing his uniform, the man slowly starved. At last, to keep alive, he obtained permission to close the doors of carriages for Palace visitors, and so lived on tips, a warning, such as Rico loved, to all his kind.

When Rico was about forty, it was noticed at the capital that he had not been seen for a month. All Government business continued as usual; but as weeks went on without his return, there was anxiety which spread from city to city, so that even Jungle runners asked those they passed, if they knew them: 'Have you seen *El Preguntón*?' or, if a group of unknowns were present, 'Have you seen *El Presidente*?' which would be more polite, should Rico himself prove to be among the group.

When about three months had passed, the governor of our Northern Province arrived unannounced, followed by a great force of troops and gorgeously dressed in gold braid. One look at him, and his

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officers, sent through the city a wail of 'Rico is dead!'

And with a speed beyond that of the telegraph or fleetest runners, as if from voice to voice, through untenanted jungle and across mile-wide rivers, this death-shriek passed. The whole nation wept. Its Golden Age had gone. No longer would justice rule. No longer would vice be controlled. So it had never been before; so it could never be again.

'Rico is dead!' cried voices everywhere. The vicious spoke hopefully; the honest in despair.

Mourning was ordered for Rico by the Governor, who now assumed the dictatorship. Soon he held an election, without an opposing candidate, for no one trusted sufficiently to head even a nominal opposition. At this election, owing to the careless zeal of his employees, the new Dictator received more votes than there were men, women, and children in our Republic. Since women and children are not allowed to vote, this result caused much amusement locally.

However, the new General-President issued a proclamation warning election officers that hereafter no more votes must be accepted than there were voters. At this there was again laughter, locally; but foreign newspapers praised the new President highly for thus 'putting a stop to the election frauds which characterized all balloting under that infamous Dictator, Rico.'

This caused ill-feeling among us, and a certain number of foreigners were killed, as always happens when the press of other countries expresses its ignorance of our Republic.

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Taxes were levied; officials were shot or promoted; and slowly all that Rico had done passed into history. Still, he did not appear to dispossess the Usurper, nor resent these changes. 'When Rico comes' became the hopeless proverb of those oppressed by the new tyranny or driven in ever-increasing numbers into dense jungle to live as bandits, deprived of all the other hopes of life. At first, it was believed that Rico had been killed in some Palace plot. There were whispers that the present Dictator had spent three months in the Palace waiting for his troops from the north to appear. Slowly, it began to be asked in whispers: 'In what prison is Rico confined by this Tyrant who now rules us?'

2. THE GIRLS' CRUSADE

Then began 'the Girls' Crusade.' Girls walked in twos and threes through cities and jungles, looking always for signs of our great President. Willingly they were jailed as wanderers, for each hoped in some neighboring cell to find and rescue the man she sought. But they had forgotten that they depended for security on man-made laws, and that while in Rico's time a chaste woman could walk a thousand miles through our Jungle and even wild beasts respect her, so it was not now. These wandering girls were seized, if pretty, for the pleasure of officials: if ugly, for the benefit of those of less importance, who, when tired of them, turned them over to overseers, as plantation laborers.

A great scandal ended the crusade. A daughter of

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the new President secretly left his Palace to seek Rico and herself could not be found. A beautiful girl, but a fool like most of her age, she imagined that safety surrounded her by act of God. A year later, she dragged herself into the Palace, broken in health, diseased, and her mind affected. She had been seized by an official, who, when she showed little interest in his pleasures, turned her over to his foreman for plantation work. She was lashed to work by day and at night herded with criminals, who beat her into submission to their desires.

Thus closed the Girls' Crusade. That freedom which Rico's Peace had given to women passed away, and rich and poor guarded their girls as best they might.

3. THE VACANT MIND

Now the son of that public writer who had been killed in the affair of the Argentine Miss had been brought up by Rico in accordance with his promise. He became the most expert public writer in my country and famous throughout Spanish-America for his intricate flourishes and exquisite curves. At eighteen, he was made head of the Government Bureau of Records. Since he had been known as one of Rico's most slavish adorers, some surprise was expressed in my circle that he seemed to feel Rico's disappearance very little, and that he was willing to serve the usurping despot.

We all knew that he had become an expert chemist in writing inks. A few of us knew that he had been

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entrusted with the secret of Talava, that ancient poison which has already been mentioned in this book. The vice of the new Despot was a love of obscene books. To the manufacture of such a book, the public writer's son devoted months. The ink he used on such parts of each page as would be touched by a finger in turning the leaves was mixed with Talava, so refined that it penetrated the skin by touch alone. Charles the Ninth of France is reputed to have been killed by a book on falconry treated in some such manner and sent him by the Borgias.

Our Despot received this book with joy, and read it eagerly, probably wetting his finger as he turned the leaves. Thereafter, in perfect health, but in mind less than a child, he was used as a figurehead by the most corrupt gang which has ever tyrannized over my country. When the inevitable *pronunciamento* came (for intolerable tyranny always brings revolt), he was killed by his officials to conceal the disgraceful way in which they had profited by his incompetence.

At this despot's death, the public writer's son disappeared as completely and as suddenly as had Rico. He is, I fancy, with Rico now. This is only my theory. Accept it or reject it as such. I have tried to state facts, and it is my duty as well as my pride to avoid all theories which might mislead my readers.

4. MAD MARTINEZ

The new General-President who assumed the power at the death of this northern Governor was the tyrant against whom I fought, to be banned, as I have

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described to you at the beginning of this book. This despot, also, died a violent death because of his own misdeeds.

He kidnaped Ulalia Martinez, at fourteen called the Beauty of the Great Forest. Her father, a mere cultivator of small fields, entered brazenly the Dictator's Palace, felling those who opposed him, and killed the Despot by breaking his skull across the sharp corner of an office desk. Then, as officials and troops swarmed around him like hiving bees, with his *machete* he made a barricade of their dead before him, calling as he struck:

'Come on, degraded slaves! Saint Peter at the gate of Heaven will be punctual to receive me if I send a score of Satan's spawn to announce my coming!'

When they shot him with a rifle through a window, he taunted them with his last breath, shouting:

'You have not killed me. I perish, strangled with laughter that I die in a palace who all my life have lived in the Jungle, *como quiere*.'^x

Mad Martinez has always aroused my envy: it fills me with despair to remember that there has been a man so much better than I. But when I spoke to the Black Ghost of this story, he merely scoffed, saying:

'Did he aid his daughter to recover her virginity by all that Palace slaughter? Or did he prevent her being thrown out of the Palace to burden our streets? I

^x 'Como quiere': 'as you please, or 'as wanted.' When a Spanish-American Dictator was caught by his successor (before being killed, which was as contrary to his wish as to that of his captors), he was given his choice of deaths, and with a wave of his cigarette, replied, 'Como quiere,' A. de F. B.

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know, for I met her. Her face was already hardened by fear and disgust, but her form was still perfect. (Of all the vices, it is women who leave to age the pleasantest memories!) Her father might have sold her at such a price as would have secured her future and his. Bah! At such virtue I laugh. Or was the successor of the despot he killed so excellent a ruler that a real man, like Mad Martinez, should die to bring him in?"

For this, again I hated the Black Ghost. Yet there was truth in what he said, for this new despot was even more cruel than those who preceded him.

5. WHAT HAPPENED TO RICO?

In these years which have wearily followed, no word of Rico has ever reached us. Was he murdered, or kidnaped? The closest examination of secret records, shown me by favor of the custodian, brings to light no order for his death nor proof of his burial. No complaint or threat seems to have been made by the tribe of Atlan, which, even since the death of the Woman of Atlan, has never failed to punish by bold assassination the killing of any of its members. Yet Rico's bodyguard of Atlan men had vanished with him.

Furthermore, no instance has ever been known in my country where a change in government left the last President alive. Nor has any of our Presidents died a natural death. Much less would so able and dangerous a man as Rico, so loved by all his people, be permitted to live when a successor assumed power.

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The wise have whispered, therefore (since no man now talks openly of political matters), that no prison holds Rico. If he is alive, he must be in safety abroad.

But if he is not dead, where did he go, and why has no sign come from him, as his people have groaned under a tyranny the worse because they had lately been free? Why did he desert them after caring for them for twenty years?

I found proof that Rico had sent abroad during his dictatorship about fifty millions of dollars. A thief, therefore, all foreigners call him. But he was worth much more than fifty millions to my country. Besides, foreign railway presidents and high bank officials are always rich. As they are born poor and boast of it, how do they get their money except as Rico got his—by 'dipping in the hand?' Do they save a fortune from their salaries? Or do they become rich by act of God?

Examination of books and letters to foreign banks shows me that Rico's millions were transmitted to his private account in European capitals. Thence, one man, while Rico was yet ruling my country, drew out the gold, shipment by shipment, in large bank bills. Was it Rico who drew it out? (Don Rico was known to have had a fondness for large bank bills: had his son inherited this fondness?) Where did it go then? In whose name was it again deposited?

These questions baffle all inquirers. Certainly, Rico's fortune never returned to my country. Where can so large a sum of money have vanished to? And remember that, besides these known deposits, it is

RICO, BANDIT AND DICTATOR

probable that Rico sent abroad through other channels another fifty or even a hundred millions — for our country was so rich that this would not have been missed.

One legend has it that Rico was the son of the missing heir to a European throne, and returned to his grandfather's domain when he disappeared from Spanish-America. European inquiries, however, disclose no return of a great prince from foreign travels. (Though, of course, Imperial secrets are well guarded, and even foreign newspapers respect such matters, as our own newspapers did many secrets of Rico's administration during his lifetime.)

Moreover, how could Rico's great personality have escaped notice in Europe? Where could he find a people so pliant that they would permit him to exercise that despotic power which habit had made a condition of his existence? Certainly in no European land. In India, perhaps he might have been overlooked: but in my opinion, founded on the slenderest of proofs, he chose China.

It is known that for five years before he left us, he repeatedly entertained Chinese travelers and delegations and treated them with a deference and courtesy he seldom showed to foreigners. His conversations with them were in a language unknown to his secretaries, but of a type which made them suspect that he had learned the Mandarin language. His retentive memory made this possible, especially as he already spoke a dozen languages.

In these last years, it was noticed and much com-

RICO DISAPPEARS

mented upon that the Chinese, who as cooks, laundrymen and small storekeepers live in our larger cities, lined our streets to see him pass, and knelt to him as if he were a god, and no longer a despised foreigner. This is my only proof, but I think that he saw the impossibility of founding a stable dynasty in Spanish-America, and, having been asked by some general to rule China, consented. I believe that in thirty or forty years he will emerge from that welter of banditry, dictators and pseudo-republics as founder of a new Chinese dynasty, and ruling the whole of a reunited China as once he ruled us.

He vanished at the height of his powers, at forty years of age, as active in mind and body as a boy. He was in control of great wealth. His skill in ruling, partly acquired in twenty years of experience, partly inherited from ancestors who for a thousand years had been dukes, counts, and emperors, was such as few men have ever achieved. The Indiada, from whom his mother came, are young at eighty, and have vigorous children at a hundred. What limits such a man in his ambitions or in his accomplishments?

THE END

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